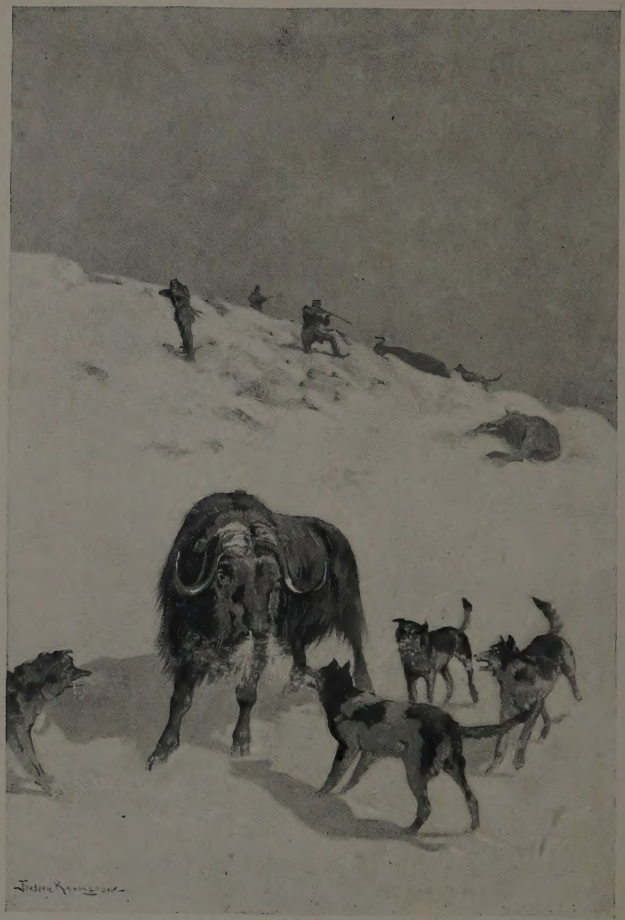
# On Snow-Shoes to the Barren Grounds

BY

CASPAR WHITNEY



MUSK-OX AT BAY

# ON SNOW-SHOES

TO THE

# BARREN GROUNDS

*TWENTY-EIGHT HUNDRED MILES AFTER MUSK-OXEN AND WOOD-BISON*

BY

CASPAR WHITNEY

AUTHOR OF "A SPORTING PILGRIMAGE"

ILLUSTRATED

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# I

## AT THE FRONTIER

FAR to the northwest, beginning ten days' journey beyond Great Slave Lake and running down to the Arctic Ocean, with Hudson's Bay as its eastern and Great Bear Lake and the Coppermine River as its western boundaries, lies the most complete and extended desolation on earth. That is the Barren Grounds, the land whose approximate 350,000 square miles (for its exact area is unknown) is the dwelling-place of no man, and whose storms and sterility in its most northerly part are withstood the year round by no living creature save the musk-ox. There is the timberless waste where ice-laden blasts blow with hurricane and ceaseless fury that bid your blood stand still and your breath come and go in painful stinging gasps; where rock and lichen and moss replace soil and trees and herbage; and where death by starvation or freezing dogs the footsteps of the explorer.

There are two seasons and only two methods of penetrating this great lone land of the North—by canoe, when the watercourses are free of ice, and on snow-shoes during the frozen period, which occupies nearly nine of the year's twelve months. The deadly cold of winter, and greater

risk of starvation, make the canoe trip the more usual one with the few Indians that hunt the musk-ox. But, because of the many portages, you cannot travel so rapidly by canoe as on snow-shoes, nor go so far north for the best of the musk-ox hunting, nor see the Barren Grounds at their best, or worst, as you care to consider it. That is why I chose to make the attempt on snow-shoes.

And why I turned my face towards a country which seemed to hold naught for the traveller but hardship? Well—certainly to hunt musk-ox, the most inaccessible game in the world, and to look upon his habitat at the period of its uttermost desolation; certainly also to study the several tribes of Indians through which I must pass on my way to the Barren Grounds; and *en route* to hunt wood-bison, undoubtedly now become the rarest game in the world. Possibly, too, I went that I might for a time escape the hum and routine sordidness of the city, and breathe air which was not surcharged with convention and civilization.

To him who has scented the trackless wilds, and whose blood has gone the pace of its perils and freedom, there comes, every now and again, an irresistible impulse to fly from electric lights, railroads, and directories; to travel on his feet instead of being jerked along in a cable-car; to find his way with the aid of a compass and the North Star, instead of by belettered lamp-posts. At such a time and in such a mood the untamed spirit chafes under the pettiness of worldly strife, and turns to the home of the red man.

'Tis a strange fascination, but strong as strange, this playing at monarch of all you survey; this demand upon your skill and endurance and perseverance in a continuous game of hazard with life as the stake; this calling home where you throw down your blankets. The mind reaches out to the freedom and the openness of a life that rises superior to the great machine called civilization, which

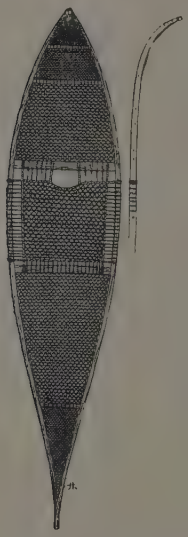
moulds us all into one proper and narrow and colorless whole. How little the fenced divisions of ordinary every-day life seem when you have returned! How petty one feels on rejoining the hysterical mob which hurries forth each morning from dwelling to office, and gathers again each night from office to dwelling.

At all events, whatever the incentive, Arthur Heming, the artist, and I found ourselves, December 27, 1894, at

NORTHWESTERN BRITISH AMERICA, SHOWING BARREN GROUNDS AND MR. WHITNEY'S ROUTE

Edmonton, the end of the railroad. We had travelled on the Canadian Pacific *viâ* Winnipeg and Calgary, and through the land of the Crees, Blackfeet, and Sarcee Indians, without seeing anything so picturesque in the way of costuming as the Winnipeg dragoon and a Sarcee

young woman resplendent in beads and glittering tinsel. I really ought to include the mounted policeman, for he too has a uniform which, with scarlet jacket and yellow-striped breeches, is deserving of greater attention. But the mounted policeman has that which is far worthier of comment than uniform. He has the reputation of being the most effective arm of the Canadian Interior Department. And he lives up to it. These "Riders of the Plains," as they are called, patrol a country so large that the entire force may lose itself within its domains and still be miles upon miles apart. Yet this comparative handful maintains order among the lawless white men and stays discontentment among the restless red men in a manner so satisfactory and so unostentatious as to make some of our United States experiences read like those of a tyro.



CREE HUNTING-SHOE, 6 feet long

The success of the Northwest Mounted Police may be accredited to its system of distribution throughout the guarded territory. Unlike our army, it does not mass its force in forts adjacent to Indian reservations. Posts it has, where recruiting and drilling are constantly going forward, but the main body of men is scattered in twos and threes over the country, riding hither and thither—a watch that goes on relief after relief. This is the secret of their success, and a system it would well repay our own government to adopt. The police are ever on the spot to advise or to arrest. They

EDMONTON
From a Photograph

do not wait for action until an outbreak has occurred; they are always in action. They constitute a most valuable peace-assuring corps, and I wish we had one like it.

Although Edmonton has but a few hundred population, it is doubly honored—by an electric-light plant which illuminates the town when not otherwise engaged, and by a patience-trying railway company that sends two trains a week to Calgary and gives them twelve hours in which to make two hundred miles. But no one, except luckless travellers, at Edmonton cares a rap about intermittent electric lights, or railroads that run passengers on a freight schedule, so long as they do not affect the fur trade. Fur was originally the reason of Edmonton's existence, and continues the principal excuse for its being. In the last three years the settlement of a strip of land south and of one to the north has created a farming or ranching contingent, but to date of my visit canned goods appeared to remain the chief article of sustenance, as furs were certainly the main topic of conversation. Edmonton may in my time develop the oasis upon which it is built, between the arid plains immediately to the south and the great lone land to the north, into something notably agricultural; but for many years the town will be, as it is to-day, the gateway of the wellnigh boundless fur-producing country to the north, and the outlet for the numberless "packs" gathered by the great Hudson's Bay Company.

SARCEE BELLE

And what a company is this!—with the power of a king and the consideration of a partner. A monopoly that does not monopolize, it stands alone a unique figure in the commercial history of the world. Given its charter by the impecunious Charles II. in 1670, the pioneers of this "Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay" sailed for the southern shores of St. James Bay, where they set up their first post and took possession of the new country in the name of Prince Rupert. Here they found a rival French company, with a previous charter granted by Louis XIII., and an equally keen sense of Indian barter, so that for many years there was more fighting than trading. Through all the long weariness of the French and other continental wars, the Hudson's Bay Company lived a varied existence of prosperity and reverses, but when Wolfe, on the Heights of Abraham, crushed the power of France in Canada, the French company entered upon a decline that finally ended in dissolution. In their stead came numbers of Englishmen, pushing their way westward, eager to trade for the furs of which they had heard so much and seen so little. Thus many trading-posts came into being, and eventually (about 1780) combined to form the North-west Fur Company, the longest-lived and most determined rival that ever disputed trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. It is not my purpose to go deeply into historical research, but a brief sketch of this company,

WINNIPEG DRAGOON

and how it came in the land, is necessary to a proper understanding of the country into which I hope to carry the reader.

The Hudson's Bay Company had not reached out to a very great extent, content with the fur gathered by their half-dozen "factories," of which York and Churchill were

SARCEE AND SQUAW "AT HOME"

the earliest and most important, and the only means of communication with which was by the ships that collected the furs and distributed the supplies annually despatched from England. But the Northwest Company brought a new spirit into the country; they pressed for trade with such avidity and determination as to carry

them into parts hitherto unknown, and cause bloodshed whenever they met the agents of their rivals. It was the greed for trade, indeed, that quickened the steps of the first adventurers into the silent, frozen land of the North. Samuel Hearne, the first white man to pass beyond Great Slave Lake, made his trip in 1769 by order of the Hudson Bay Company, and in search of copper-mines. It was in quest of trade for the Northwest Company that Alexander Mackenzie (1789) penetrated to the Arctic Ocean down the river which bears his name. I have never been able to appreciate the justice in the command that knighted Mackenzie and ignored Hearne. The latter's trip was really a most remarkable one—overland a great part, and always the more difficult. Mackenzie's trip, as compared with it, reads like a summer day's pleasuring.

For forty years these two companies traded with the Indians, and fought one another at every opportunity, meanwhile pushing their posts farther and farther into the interior; but in 1821 a compromise was effected, an amalgamation resulted, and the Hudson's Bay Company reigned supreme. And so it has continued to reign ever since; for though it retired from the government of Rupert's Land in 1870, and handed it over to the Dominion of Canada for £300,000 sterling, yet, so far as the country is concerned of which Edmonton is the distributing-point, the Hudson's Bay Company is as much the ruler in fact as ever it was in law. But this particular section, even though so extensive, is only one of the many in which, from end to end of British North America, this company counts altogether something like two hundred trading-posts. Nor are furs its sole commodity: from Montreal to Victoria along the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and at the centres of the Indian countries in which they trade, may be seen the

"stores" of the Hudson's Bay Company. Its £2,000,000 sterling capital stock is owned in London, but the business of the vast corporation is operated from Winnipeg, with "Commissioner" C. C. Chipman as its executive head.

Except that goods are now much cheaper and furs much dearer, the fur-trading business of this company is conducted at its inland posts on much the same lines that prevailed when it was first established. The custom of barter still exists, and those who have experienced the difficulties of exchanging with a peddler one article for another will be interested in knowing how this was met by the Hudson's Bay Company. The original principal article of trade for which the Governor and Company of Adventurers first sent out their ships to Hudson's Bay was the beaver-skin. Other furs were soon traded in, and it became necessary to have a standard of trade. The "made beaver"—*i.e.*, a full-grown dressed beaver-skin—was taken as the standard, and every article in goods or furs priced upon it. Thus, an Indian having brought in a parcel of furs was told that they amounted to so many "made beaver." With this amount, as it were, to his credit, he went into the trading-store and was told the prices of the articles he wished to possess, also in "made beaver." Soon it was found more convenient to have a token which should represent the "made beaver." At first these were made of pieces of wood with notches to

ONE "MADE BEAVER" TOKEN
Formerly issued by the Hudson's Bay Company

represent the value, but were soon replaced with a metal coin. Quills and bullets were also sometimes used for this purpose. In the far North, and in fact at many points not very far from the line of railway, the Indian still gets his advances to enable him to go hunting, and

A MEDICINE-MAN'S LODGE

pays back his debts in the spring-time in "made beaver," or "skins," as the medium of exchange is technically known. Though the march of civilization and consequent competition have made it more difficult to deal with the Indians, the trade in many respects is conducted as it was over two hundred years ago.

One surprise at least awaited me at Edmonton. I had expected—I will be more honest, and say I had hoped—Edmonton would prove to be a bit untamed and picturesque. The realization of being on this Canadian frontier raised memories of other frontier days across the

line, when Colorado and New Mexico were wild and woolly, and the atmosphere was continuously shattered by cowboy whoops and leaden pellets.

Edmonton, however, never passed through such a period of exhilaration. It had its days of waywardness, but its diversions were exceedingly commonplace. A few years ago it was almost surrounded by the battling-ground of the Crees and Blackfeet, and, as a matter of course, harbored red and white renegades. There was little law, and that little was not respected; Indians out in the country killed off their foes from ambush, and in town renegades revealed their coward's blood and lack of originality by stabbing their enemies in the back. There were none of those blood-stirring nights in town such as we used to have on our own frontier; no duels on the main thoroughfare between two "prominent citizens," with the remaining population standing by to see fair play; no cowboys to ride into saloons and shoot out the lights; no marks-

AN ENCAMPMENT NEAR CALGARY

men so expert as to knock the neck off the whiskey-bottle in the bartender's hands, and no bartenders who under such conditions did not turn a hair.

There was murdering in plenty in and around Edmonton in the old days, but no man maintained a private burying-ground. This is not a distinction without a dif-

ference, as those with frontier experience will bear me out.

I found Edmonton settled into a steady-going business community, with many hotels and few saloons, and the most exciting sight I beheld during my two-nights-and-a-day stop was a freighter wrestling with himself after a bout with "40 proof."

Indeed, when I set out, the morning after my arrival, to get all in readiness in the one day that we might make the start for Lac La Biche on the second, I doubted if the citizens had ever heard of the word "hustle." I had been delayed in leaving New York, delayed in having to stop over at Winnipeg to get letters of credit from the Hudson's Bay Company, and, now that I had finally reached the frontier, I was determined to be delayed no longer if effort of mine would provide against it. First of all, the shops did not open until nine o'clock, and I, forgetful of being in a latitude where the sun in winter does not show himself before that hour, found myself chasing about the streets in the dawn that, before coming out of doors, I fancied due to a clouded sky. At last the shops and the sun opened for the day, and I succeeded in getting every one on the move. Still, we should not have been able to get away next day, I am sure, but for the consideration of the Hudson's Bay Company factor, Mr. Livock, and his chief aid, Mr. Kinnaird, who were kind enough to neglect their business to attend to mine. The one happy stroke we had made was in choosing the Queen's for our hotel; it was quite haphazard, but very lucky.

Here I found the best board to which I had ever sat down in a frontier town, and host and hostess who did more for me during my sojourn than the bill showed or I could repay.

GOING FOR AN AFTERNOON DRIVE AT EDMONTON

## II

### OFF FOR LAC LA BICHE

If such signs were trustworthy, I should have been much elated over the auspicious weather that ruled on the day of our departure for La Biche. Truly it was a beautiful morning, with the temperature some twenty degrees

OFF FOR LAC LA BICHE

below zero, and a glorious sun, which touched the ice-covered bushes and trees with sparkling brilliancy. When we started on our 175-mile drive, all Queen's Hotel, and, I judged, half the town, turned out to bid us godspeed.

We had two good horses and a strong box-sleigh, and our load was not heavy, so that I expected to make good time. I had taken only enough provisions from Edmonton to last us to La Biche. There was much I could have taken, of course, in the way of canned vegetables, meats, etc., that might have saved me from many a meal of the oftentimes unpalatable stuff which I secured from post to post. But I was going into the country for a purpose, and not for a picnic. I knew perfectly well I could not carry in a sufficient supply to last until I had covered the 900 miles that lay between me and Great Slave Lake, because of the impossibility of securing enough dogs and sledges to freight it, and I knew even if I could eat as a civilized man until I reached that point, I should be obliged, when I began my journey into the Barren Grounds, to abandon all hope of eating well, or even plentifully, and to live or starve as do the Indians on their annual hunt in that region. Besides, the greatest essential to the success of my trip was speed. I had set out to make my bison-hunt, to get into the Barren Grounds for musk-oxen, and get back again to Great Slave Lake on snow-shoes — an undertaking that had been never before attempted, and which every one assured me I could not carry out. It meant snow-shoeing nearly 1900 miles, and left no time for leisurely travelling; but I was determined to accomplish what I had planned if it lay within human possibilities; and thus it was that we took no unnecessary freight from Edmonton, for civilized food is so considered in that great North land. Tobacco was the only article of which I took a greater supply; but tobacco is not considered freight; it is always a solace, and becomes on occasion a stimulant when there is no meat, and an irresistible lure to facilitate intercourse with the Indians.

It was well we had a stout sleigh, for, much to my astonishment, the snow seemed little more than a foot deep anywhere, while in the road it had been worn down by much travel, and the rocks were numerous and aggressive. We made twenty-two miles by noon of the first day, and took our dinner at Fort Saskatchewan, the most northerly post of the Northwest Mounted Police. Up to this point of the day's journey the road had been plain, and the country not unpleasant to the eye. In fact, in some parts it is rather pretty, of a general rolling character, fringed with small timber, mostly of the poplar variety, though pine is fairly abundant. It looks like, and is, in truth, a grazing country more especially, though the horses and cattle I saw *en route* were rather poor—a condition to be probably expected in a land where everything is new and the settlers lead a hand-to-mouth existence, as all settlers do. An Edmonton enthusiast—I think he must have had property for sale—assured me with great gusto that the land around that town would yield from 35 to 75 bushels of wheat to the acre, and from 100 to 200 bushels of oats, the latter weighing 42 pounds to the bushel; the lumber, however, he acknowledged "wasn't much to brag on."

The one well-defined road we had been following all day broadened out towards sunset into a valley, showing in turn several depressions in the snow—here much deeper—which we assumed to be roads. No one at Saskatchewan was able to direct us intelligently, and not a soul had been seen since leaving there from whom we could ask our way. Grierson, who was driving us, and who is one of the Queen's Hotel proprietors, had never before been over the road, but his bump of direction was well placed and abnormally developed. People in this country do not seem to consider knowledge of the roads

necessary to reach their destination. They start off on the one main and almost only trail, which they follow to its end, and then they continue on in the direction of their objective point. Roads are few and far between in this section, and disappear altogether when you get one hundred miles north of Edmonton. The alleged road to La Biche, which bears to the east of north, is the longest, and the end; beyond, all travel is by dogs in winter and canoe in summer. Grierson knew that Beaver Lake Creek was the point we were booked to reach that night in order to make La Biche in three days' travel from Edmonton, and he was sure it lay to the northeast. So we pegged on, until finally, after chasing several lights that turned out to be the wrong ones, and once nothing less lofty than a planet, which in this far North hung near the horizon, we found the log cabin of Beaver Lake Creek's most distinguished settler.

I say distinguished, because his was the only cabin in those parts which boasted of two rooms and a second story—an extravagance, he informed us, he had indulged in with the idea of one day, when the section in which he had located became more populous, putting a stock of merchandise into the "other room," and utilizing the top story as a dormitory for travellers.

Having refreshed myself in about one and a half inches of ice-water, I was confronted by this black-lettered legend on the cabin door: "Bad luck attend the man that wipes his nose on the towel"—which convinced me our host was a gentleman of discernment, with a delicate humor for inciting reform in his guests without offending their previously conceived sense of propriety.

We left the pioneer of Beaver Lake Creek's "400" next morning before the sun was up, and by one o'clock had gone thirty-eight miles to Victoria, on the Saskatchewan

River. It is the site of a Hudson's Bay Company trading-post, and the end of the telegraph line. Once past here, the most rapid means of communication is the "express," as the Indian runner is called. To me, as sportsman, the most interesting feature of Victoria was the fact of its being about the northern limit of wapiti in this particular part of the continent. Formerly, in the days of the bison, wapiti were numerous, particularly near the Battle River, but, although they have not entirely disappeared, they are not now plentiful, and are to be had only by the most skilful hunters. Because of this the Indians living near Victoria resort to every device for a shot, but with indifferent success.

COPPER KETTLE
in which the author brewed his tea during the entire trip

This was our longest day's drive, for we had made very close to eighty miles by eleven o'clock at night, when we camped, and the road, or rather the multiplicity of roads, of the afternoon proved even more perplexing than on the day previous. Our direction lay along the border of a Cree Indian reservation, and was cross-sectioned at times with trails, or at least what in the snow had the appearance of trails, running to the four points of the compass. We knew we had but one point of the compass to follow—of that much, at least, we were sure, and proportionately thankful—but that point seemed to be such a broad one we were constantly at a loss for our precise bearings. I should be very much relieved to know positively if there was indeed any trail taking a northeasterly course that escaped us, and shall always regret I did not return

by that route in the spring on my way back to the railroad, and when the snow had disappeared, just to satisfy my curiosity.

We were making for the White-Fish Lake Indian reservation, where we had been told we could find feed and a covering for the horses, and a school-master who would give us a place to throw down our blankets, and the best of his larder. We were not concerned for ourselves, for we carried enough to provide a substantial meal, and, I think, all three of us would have preferred sleeping in the open to the average cabin. But the mercury had fallen a great many degrees since leaving Edmonton, a cutting wind was blowing, and our horses were pretty well worn, with still forty-five miles to go the next day before reaching La Biche. This was why we pushed on, hoping every turn would show the light in the distance that meant rest for us and an extra feed for our team. We finally reached some straggling cabins of the reservation, but should have been searching for that light yet if we had not roused an Indian from his slumbers, whom Grierson, by some startling Cree vocalization, the like of which I never heard before nor since, at length made understand what we were after. Then that drowsy child of nature led the way to a school-master, but not to the school-master we had been seeking, whose house was a few miles farther on, we subsequently learned.

The school-master we found was a study in filth. He lived like a dog in a wretched kennel, and talked like a cockney Englishman; indeed, he confided to me he had come from London, and was living there chiefly to learn the Cree language, that he might later preach "Jesus to the wayward heathen." Meanwhile he was educating him. This cockney's one idea of education seemed summed up in the single word coercion. If the Indians gathered for

the dances of their tribe, he scattered them; if they played the games of their childhood, he stopped them; if they asked for reasons, he told them it was the devil in them that they exploited and which he wished to cast out. A logical way, forsooth, of educating the ignorant! And this is why we find the broken-spirited Indian, who realizes he is the creature of an all-powerful master whose ways he cannot understand, so often "converted," but only in individual cases educated and civilized. He is "converted" because it requires only outward acquiescence, and he finds his material life made pleasanter thereby. He is willing to change his "Great Spirit" for the white man's "Great Spirit" when a few beads or an extra ration make the trade inviting. But he cannot be educated without being first civilized, and he cannot be civilized because in most cases the white man does not know how, or does not find it to his interest, to make the attempt in a rational way. At present he distrusts, and sees only that he is being "civilized" off the face of the earth, and remembers the white man in his successive rôles of welcomed guest, greedy hunter, settler, and exterminator. I am not dealing in heroics, and every one knows that the savage must disappear before the civilized man; but if we are to attempt the civilization of those that remain let us first endeavor to gain their confidence, and then follow it up by methods which they can grasp.

It is not to be done in one season, nor in two; the civilized red man cannot be brought forth full-fledged, as from a patent incubator; he can be evolved only after long periods of gradual and natural development; yet we expect by mere word of mouth to make him forsake the sentiments of a lifetime, of generations of lifetimes. At the same time he should realize there is a law in the land which punishes and protects him as thoroughly as it does

the white man. He should not be allowed to escape with no severer penalty for furtive war-path festivals than that of being merely herded back to his reservation, when white men equally guilty would be hanged or shot. The surest way of civilizing the Indian is through his children, and possibly their children in turn will cease to remember that once their ancestors roamed over the country hunting and learning the lessons of their common mother Nature, instead of living fenced in on a reservation, ploughing, and studying the precepts of the white man.

"We left the Indian reformer early the next morning, after a broken night's rest on a dirtier floor than, I think, I ever saw in an Indian lodge. We must have proved a blessing to that fellow, for we put money in his purse, and such a meal in his stomach as I fancy he had not had for many a day. The weather had grown colder, and one of our horses gone lame, but our big fur coats to keep out the one, and mustang liniment to relieve the other, put us in travelling shape. We had broken our sleigh, and patched it up again before we camped for our noonday meal in a squall of snow, but we had covered by that time a good half of the distance which the previous night separated us from our destination. As we neared La Biche we renewed our troubles over diverging roads, but this time our direction was so accurate that the delay

BLANKET CLOTHING OF THE LOWER NORTHLAND

GOING TO LA BICHE FOR NEW YEAR'S. CREE INDIANS IN "JUMPER"
From a Photograph by the author

was inconsiderable. Moreover, there were others abroad; for the morrow was New-Year's, and Indians and half-breeds were making their way to the company post to partake of the feast which is provided for them annually. They came from either side, and fell into the now well-beaten track we were all travelling; men and women, old and young, some walking, but the majority riding in a sort of box set upon runners, locally known as a "jumper," and drawn by a nondescript kind of beast which we discovered upon close scrutiny to be an undersized, underfed horse, but that more nearly resembled an overgrown jack-rabbit.

And thus with the dying sun of the last day of 1894 we made our *entrée* into La Biche with the gathering of the clans.

## III

### NEW-YEAR'S AT LA BICHE

I DO not believe I was ever in a more advanced state of exhilaration than on first viewing the unsightly cabins of the La Biche post. Farther along on my trip I felt a deeper thankfulness, when hope had almost fled, and mind and body were too jaded to rejoice, but now I was as a boy given an unexpected holiday, who wanted to shout and throw his cap into the air; for here at last I beheld the actual frontier, and the real starting-point of my journey. Not that the trip from Edmonton had been so long or so hard, for, as a matter of fact, it was pleasant and easy, but it was the realization of being on the scene of action, so to say. When one has planned an adventure, and discussed ways and means, there is a satisfaction in reaching the base of operations; and when one's friends have tried to dissuade and natives to intimidate you, there is added to satisfaction that other feeling, which puts you on edge, fires your blood, and makes you keen to toe the mark and be off. It was a blessing I arrived in such humor, for it was sorely tried at La Biche during the three vexing days we were compelled to stop there. I had a premonition we were going to run against a snag when I saw Gairdner, the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge, saunter out of his cabin to greet us; and when he asked if we were not ahead of time, in a tone that implied he would have been better pleased had we been overdue, I

felt convinced we were "in for it." We were a day in advance of our schedule, having taken but three instead of four days from Edmonton, but as an "express" had been sent Gairdner two weeks before to warn him of our arrival, and as the preparations were only the making of two pairs of snow-shoes and the engaging of two trains of dogs and drivers, I could not see that our coming was ill-timed.

I think, nevertheless, he was glad to see us (especially Grierson, who had brought along a flask), and he certainly shared the best of his house with us. He told us we had come at the best time of the year to see the Indians; that they were always given a feast and a dance on New-Year's, and that some of them, hearing of our arrival, would probably drop in that night to dance a little for us. Well, they did "drop in," and they did dance, though not a "little." How those creatures danced, and what an atmosphere and a racket they created in that house! They began to arrive shortly after we had finished supper, shaking hands with us solemnly on entrance, and eying us stealthily after seating themselves in rows against the walls. Then one of them produced a fiddle, and from the time the first measure was sounded there was no cessation until about two o'clock the following morning.

For a while the exhibition was rather interesting, though never very novel. The common dancing of Indians appears to be about the same the country over; there is but one type, though it may assume different expressions, according to prejudice or locality. Either they shuffle around in a circle, or they hop from one foot to the other in lines or separately, or they do all three, with more or less vigor and with or without costuming. At La Biche the dancing is not of the Indian type, but rather of the kind one sees in the half-breed camps of Canada, and con-

sists of a species of jigs and reels gone through at a pace that makes you dizzy only to watch. They have their dances where several couples perform, but the most popular seemed that in which separate couples engaged—as many as the floor would accommodate. These face one another, and the man enters upon a vigorous exploitation of the double-shuffle, which he varies with "pigeon-wings" and other terpsichorean flourishes, always making the greatest noise of which he is capable. Noise and endurance, I was given to understand, are the two requisites to good dancing; but men and women of course wear moccasins, and only on occasions have board floors to dance on. It was my luck to happen along at one of those "occasions," and to be further tortured by a half-breed company servant, whose great pride was a pair of white man's heavy boots, which he never wore except when threading the giddy maze.

Half-breeds—French and Cree—constitute the larger share of population at La Biche, if I may class as its population those scattered over the immediately surrounding country, and where the settlement consists of just three cabins besides those belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company. But, after all, the French blood reveals itself chiefly in a few Christian names and in the more fanciful coloring and use of some articles of wear, for there is little French spoken, the children of mixed parentage almost invariably adopting the mother-tongue, Cree, which the ingenuity of Catholic priests has raised to the dignity of a written language. There are not more than one hundred Crees who come into La Biche, which is the most northerly post where treaty money is given, and they are not increasing nor even thriving to any very great extent. The annuity of about five dollars a head is not sufficient to support and just enough to interrupt keen hunting; they plant a

few potatoes, which grow here fairly well, but are making no progress towards self-support, as are those of the same nation more to the south.

After what I had seen the night before of the preliminaries to the annual feast-day, I did not expect on New-Year's to be able to make any preparations for our further progress. Long before we had turned out of our blankets the house was literally packed with Indians, and by noon-time the fiddle was going and the dancers had entire possession of the floor. I doubt if I ever saw, outside of some of the Chinese dens in San Francisco, so many crowded into the same space. I lacked the heart to talk business with Gairdner, who, I divined from some of his remarks, had not accomplished, in the way of making ready our dog brigade, all I had expected of him. I simply pitied him for the unpleasant and malodorous fulness of his home, and I pitied his half-breed wife and her daughters, who were kept cooking for and feeding half-starved Indians from early morn until late into the night. Heming took his pencil and scratch pad and I my camera, and we went out to see the New-Year's-day arrivals and the dogs and the Indians.

In front of the fort's stockade were gossiping groups that grew with each fresh arrival, while scattered all about the enclosure, just where their drivers had left them, were the dog trains of the Indians who had come to fill Gairdner's house and eat the Hudson's Bay Company meat. There was no housing nor feasting for these dogs; in a 24°-below-zero atmosphere they stretched out in the snow and waited, without covering and without food. The Indians with their blanket coats or capotes, and the dogs and sledges and "jumpers," made a picturesque whole against the unbroken background of snow, but, like all Indian pictures, its attractiveness faded

away on close inspection that discovered the dirt of the man, and the scraggy, half-starved condition of the beast. These people had never before seen a camera, and many of my plates show them scurrying away or

IN A 24°-BELOW-ZERO ATMOSPHERE

turning their backs. It was only after the most elaborate descriptions to Gairdner, who instructed the interpreter, who explained to the Indians, that we induced one or two "types" to sit in our presence while Heming sketched them. They thought we were making "medicine" against them, but were won over by Heming drawing the moose and caribou, while they watched the animals they knew so well develop under his pencil.

When we returned to the house the dance was still on; it was always "on" during the first thirty-six hours of our stay at La Biche. Formerly the Hudson's Bay Company officers merely "received" on New-Year's day; but as the

Indians have a custom between sexes of kissing on meeting, and as it did not become an impartial officer to distinguish in this respect between old women and young, unattractive and attractive, the feast was substituted; so now the women are fed and danced instead of being kissed.

I hope that New-Year's night will not be recorded against me. Those Indians danced until four o'clock in the morning, and they danced to my utter demoralization. We sat around and watched the "gymnastics" and pretended we enjoyed them until about one o'clock; then we retired. We all three slept in Gairdner's office, a tiny apartment separated from the main room by a thin board partition, of which a good quarter section in the centre was removed to admit of the two rooms sharing a single stove. There was a piece of loosened sheet-iron tacked to the partition to protect it from the heat, and my head was against that partition, and our blankets on the same floor upon which those Indians sprinted and jumped and shuffled!

New-Year's past and the fiddle hung up, I entered upon the business of our getting under way for Fort McMurray, the next Hudson's Bay post to the north, and then indeed did the trouble begin. First of all, Gairdner earnestly assured me I could not make the trip I contemplated, that I could not get into the Barren Grounds at this season, and would risk my life if I did, and could not get Indians to accompany me if I would. Then, after finding me undismayed by the lugubrious prospect, he informed me that he had not been able to get matters ready, nor could he say how soon we might start. He had first engaged two men, but both backed out, one because he could not get four dogs together, and the other because he had no house to put his wife in during his absence. Finally he had secured the services of a half-breed called "Shot," who, he

said, was the best man in the country, trustworthy and a good traveller, and had spoken to another half-breed, who was just then struggling to make up his mind. Added to

HALF-BREED DOG DRIVER

this pleasing intelligence, the snow-shoes were being made by an Indian who lived fifteen miles away, and from whom nothing had been heard. I thought we were at least sure of "Shot"; but the next day he came to us with a large story of his worth, of the sacrifices he would make by going with us, and finally ended by refusing to budge unless we doubled the wages upon which he and Gairdner had agreed.

For the remainder of this and the next day life was a burden to me. Gairdner was absolutely of no use, as he could have been by standing between us and the Indians in our negotiations. I was obliged to take matters into my

own hands, and deal with the wrangling Indians through an interpreter. I finally secured "Shot" on a compromise, intending to take no other man, but drive the second train of dogs ourselves. Then I had a time getting another four dogs and sledge. First the owners would not hire a train without their own engagement (this after I had spent two days trying to induce them to go with me!), then no one man who had a complete train could be found. At last I got two dogs from one Indian, and one dog each from two different Indians. Meanwhile I was waiting for "Shot," who was to come prepared for the start so soon as the snow-shoes were finished, and being worried thin by the dog-owners' repeated visits and their clamors for a new deal; having hired the dogs and sledge, they wanted me to pay an additional fee for harness and wrapper, or, if not, to give them a little tea or tobacco, or moccasins. I was in constant dread lest their fickleness should eventually deprive me of a train, and I cursed "Shot" roundly for his delay. Meanwhile, too, Heming and I were conditioning ourselves by some running every afternoon, and had settled to the conviction that the hardest part of our trip appeared to be getting started.

EDMONTON FREIGHTER

At last, on Friday, January 4th, the impatiently awaited "Shot" arrived, with his dogs and sledge in good condition, but the sledge of the second train broken so badly as to necessitate its repair. "Shot" had also brought with him a young Cree Indian called John, whom he recommended as a good runner; and afterwards, when Heming fell ill, and John and I pushed on into the country alone, I forgave "Shot" much of what I had harbored against him because of his bringing me that Cree. It was noon before the sledge had been mended and we were ready to begin packing up for the start. Our personal luggage consisted of a change of shirts and heavy underwear, three silk pocket-handkerchiefs, an extra pair of Irish frieze trousers, a heavy woollen sweater, stout gloves to wear inside the native-made mittens, two pairs of Hudson's Bay Company four-point blankets, a rabbit-skin robe (of native manufacture, and very warm), "stroud" leggings, a caribou-skin capote lined with blanket, a knitted hood, a worsted tuque, "duffel" socks, snow-glasses, several pairs of moccasins, hunting-knife, strong clasp-knife, a 45.90 Winchester, half-magazine, and 150 cartridges, pills, and mustang liniment; I had, besides, a compass, my camera (in a strong zinc box), note-books, and some iodoform, antiseptic lozenges, and sterilized gauze bandages, in case amputation because of freezing became necessary. Our provisions included bacon, tea, flour, and a few pounds of potatoes Mrs. Gairdner was kind enough to boil and mash and freeze into a pan for us; our one luxury—or rather mine, for Heming does not smoke—was tobacco. In all we had just 357 pounds, which I was careful to determine, for I was sure "Shot" would be grumbling about the load, and swear we had 600 pounds on each sledge, and I wished to be prepared with figures, as I had said we should go light purposely to make good time. We took only one night's

fish for the dogs (dogs being fed fish in this country in place of meat), because Gairdner told us we should find plenty at Hart Lake, which we would reach the next night. Finally by three o'clock the sledges were packed, "Shot" and John had bade tender farewells to every man, woman, and child about the post, Gairdner and Grierson had wished us the best of luck, and we began our journey.

| | TRANSLATION |
|---|---|
| ᓂᓱᓴᓂᐸ ᓂᔑᑫᒪᒋᐦᑫᐧᐣ | "LAC LA BICHE, *Jan.* 2, 1895. |
| ᓂ ᑲᑫᑕᒋᔑᑎᐣ | "My name is Julien, and I have had |
| ᑎᐟᑕ ᐃᐧᐃᓇᐯᒪᓂᐧᐃᐣ | plenty of misery up to to-day. |
| ᐧᐃᑲ ᐃ ᒋᐧᑲᐯᐧᐃᐣ | "I do not see well. |
| ᒋᐟᐯᐟ | "I have always sore eyes. |
| ᐃᑲᒋᑫᐟᓂ ᑲᑊᓇᔑᓂ | "I am very much troubled when |
| ᒥᐟᑕᐃ ᓂᐃᐟᐧᓂᔑᑎᐣ | I get no fur. |
| ᐃᑯᓇ ᒥᑫ | "I gain my living by hunting |
| ᐃᐯ ᑲᐯ ᔑᐣ | in the woods. |
| ᐃᑫᐟᔑᐣ ᐧᐃᒥᔑᐧᑲᐯᐧᐃᐣ | "I have gained nothing this |
| ᐧᐃᔑᑯ ᐃᐧᐃᑭᐟ | winter. |
| ᓂᔑ ᔑᐣ | "I am well to-day." |

CREE AS IT IS WRITTEN

[A letter in the characters invented by a Roman Catholic priest thirty years ago]

## IV

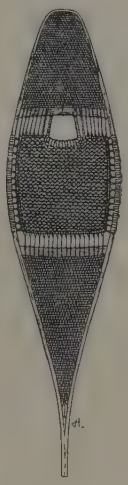
### UNDER WAY FOR McMURRAY

WITH several Indians running before to escort us beyond the post in approved style, we left La Biche at a pretty brisk gait, and maintained for a good hour a pace which must have carried us six miles. But Heming and I were so delighted at being finally and really under way that no speed those Indians could have set would have been too stiff for us. As we ran we now and again delivered ourselves of congratulations that were expressive, if brief and somewhat disconnected in delivery. We had been delayed three days and a half at La Biche, fussing with Indians that had more time than energy, more promise than execution, and who broke contracts as rapidly as they made them. Gairdner had annoyed me a great deal, and no doubt we had worried him not a little, breaking in upon the even and lethargic tenor of his monotonous life with our "outside" (as the great world is called by the denizens of this lone land) hustling ways. But now that it is all past, and the trip successfully made, I am willing to forgive and be forgiven.

LUMBERMAN'S SHOE, Ottawa River, 3⅛ feet long

We did not expect to go far that night; our chief desire was to get started; and, besides, we knew we should pass several Indian houses, where we must stop, that

"Shot" and John might live up to the usual demands of the country courtesy, and shake hands with the occupants, and gossip about the white men they were guiding over the first stage of their long journey. Shaking hands always includes the further ceremony of filling up the pipes and a drink of tea, should the host happen to have any of that luxury, and so when we had left the last Indian lodge, and crossed the north-east end of the lake and got well into the woods, it was sunset, and time to camp. The going down of the sun is the invariable signal for camping, for the twilight is of short duration, and the Indians will not run the risk of accident by chopping wood after dark. And they are quite right. A cut foot or leg in civilization is ordinarily little more than inconvenient, but in this trackless wilderness any wound that handicaps a man's walking may lead to his death. And so as the sun begins to disappear below the horizon you grow watchful for a place that is most sheltered and best wooded and nearest the direction in which you are going.



TRACKER'S SHOE, Canadian Snow-Shoe Club, 5½ feet long

By the time we had gathered firewood it began to snow, and we ate our first meal in the open, with backs arched to windward, and capote hoods pulled up over our heads to keep the flakes from going down our necks. That first night out was an interesting one to me; with recollections of bivouacs in the Rockies, I thought the fire insignificant and the timber small, but the dogs sitting on their haunches watching the thawing of the frozen fish that were to furnish them with supper, and

the sledges drawn on the banked-up snow at the head of our blankets, made a scene that was novel to me, and also somewhat picturesque.

Every one was sleeping the sleep of the weary, if not of the just, and the dogs had eaten and curled themselves up in the snow for the night, when I finally threw off my meditative mood and rolled up in my blankets.

It snowed all night, and when we broke camp the next morning at six it was still snowing, and there was a cold head-wind that made us move lively to keep comfortable. The trail wound through brush and small timber, and now and again across a small lake, but its greatest length lay over what is called "muskeg," which is Cree for swamp, and the most tiring, patience-testing travelling I had ever encountered.

Imagine a landlocked lake swept by furious cross-winds, and its entire surface churned into choppy waves; suppose it suddenly congealed at its angriest moment; further, suppose a deep layer of miry earth covered by thick, heavy moss moulded upon it, and stuck full of close-growing stout brush. That is the muskeg. Now fancy walking over a succession of uneven hummocks with brush constantly catching your snow-shoe and slapping your face, and you will have a vague idea of the difficulties of muskeg travel. Level footing is exceedingly scarce, the wind blows the snow "whither it listeth," and you cannot know whether you are about to step on top of one of those innumerable mounds or into one of the many gutters that cross-section the swamp. You know after you have taken the step. Nine times out of ten you land on the slanting side of the mound, and slip and trip and turn your ankle and use yourself up generally. It is exceedingly difficult going, and Heming and

THE INDIAN'S STOREHOUSE AND LARDER

I, who relieved one another breaking trail for the dogs, found it very fatiguing.

It was storming hard and getting colder, and I was ahead setting the pace, when, about three o'clock that afternoon, I came upon a log hut, and two trails that bore away in different directions. I wish I could have photographed the scene which slowly materialized from out of the darkness as I stood on the earthen floor within the cabin while my eyes grew accustomed to the changed conditions. On entering I could distinguish only the fire in one end, before which squatted a couple of Indians and a squaw, but gradually the shadows lifted, and I found myself for a few moments busily engaged shaking hands with Indians as fast as the new light revealed them. It was a very small cabin, barely ten feet square, I should say, with a parchment-covered hole in the wall for a window, and a door which demanded a bowed head of every visitor. I do not know how many Indians were in that hut, but I recall wondering how they arranged for sleeping, as there seemed hardly space for them to sit, much less lie down. They were about to eat, and several rabbits, suspended full length from a deer thong, and minus only their skins, were twirling and roasting before the fire, while others were being prepared for the cooking. I was not partial to rabbit, nor especially happy in the cabin's atmosphere, so when I had warmed a bit I went outside to await the remainder of my party.

Heming and John hove in sight shortly, but quite half an hour had passed when "Shot" and his dogs loomed up in the storm, that seemed increasing every minute. Then "Shot" and I had our first battle royal. He fancied the smell of the roasting rabbit and the warm cabin; he did not like the sleet driving in our faces, and he wanted to camp. I was annoyed at the interruptions to our prog-

ress, disgusted with "Shot" for his vainglorious mouthing at La Biche and his halting gait since leaving there, and determined that night to reach Hart Lake, which was only seven or eight miles farther on, and where we expected to get fish (of which we then had none) for our dogs. In language that was pointed I reminded "Shot" of my being the commander-in-chief of our little expedition, and made him understand we were out neither for pleasure nor for our health, that we had an objective point, and intended to get there without loss of time, and without camping in every cabin we discovered or being headed off by every severe storm we encountered. "Shot" spluttered a great deal at first, and then looked as if it would give him pleasure to bury his hunting-knife in my flesh; but he sulked instead, and we moved away from the crowded little house and the roasting rabbits.

NATIVE-MADE MEN'S LEGGING GARTERS, From an old and lost design

There had been a broken trail from this point to Hart Lake, but the same storm that was making our walking so arduous had almost obliterated it, and night had long since fallen and the thermometer registered 30° below zero when we reached the cabin of the Indian who Gairdner had said would sell us fish enough to last to the McMurray fishery. But, like all the things Gairdner told us, we found realization quite different from promise. The Indian was willing enough to sell, but his cache was fifteen miles away; he had just heard it had been broken into

and all his fish stolen, so that he could not say whether or no he really had any; and, at all events, he could not make the journey in one day, and would not start the next (Sunday), because it was the occasion of the priest's yearly visit to this district. I was sorry to jeopard his soul by depriving it of the annual shriving, but I believed my dogs in more urgent need of fish than he of salvation, and I was sure three days' delay at Hart Lake would blight definitely whatever hopes of a future reward I might previously have enjoyed. Therefore I set about to wreck that Indian's peace of mind. Four skins—*i.e.*, two dollars—quieted spiritual alarms, a silk handkerchief to the wife secured a promise to make the trip to the cache and back in one day, and the *coup d'état* was executed by enlisting "Shot's" sympathies through my assuring him that, fish or no fish, I should start Monday morning, and, if necessary, feed our bacon to the dogs, and complete the journey on tea and potatoes, of which latter we had a few meals left. Thus it was that I got the Indian started off early Sunday morning for his cache, and saved two souls and eight dogs.

The beneficence of the La Biche priest extended further that Sunday than he knew. Heming and I blessed his coming without stint, for it emptied of its usual occupants the filthy cabin in which we were obliged to spend the day and another night, and gave us an opportunity to sweep the floor and renew intimate relations with water.

When we took up our journey again Monday morning, with the insufficient supply of fish got from the Indian's despoiled cache, the mercury had dropped to 54° below zero, and there was no longer a broken trail. Our first ten miles lay across a lake, and both Heming and I, who were breaking road, and sinking up to our knees in the snow, were frequently startled by a rumbling as of distant

thunder as the ice cracked under us. It was a curious sensation, too, to have these explosions at our feet, vibrating towards the shores in successive and receding detonations, like the rings which widen and follow upon one another when you have thrown a stone into a pond. On one occasion water followed the cracking, and we were obliged to run hard, until we stopped for dinner, to keep our feet from freezing.

WAPITI HUNTER

The going was exceedingly difficult all day long, in deep snow, across lakes, through bunches of stunted spruce, and over the redoubtable muskeg, where the sledges required constant handling, and never by any chance remained right side up for more than a few moments at a time. Still, the weather remained clear, and when we camped, at six o'clock, the stars were shining brightly, and we had left Hart Lake thirty-eight miles behind us, Heming and I running the last nine miles in one hour and forty minutes.

## V

### HEMING TURNS BACK

I HAD been very much worried over Heming's condition the last two days. On the night we arrived at Hart Lake he seemed considerably worn, and the only consolation I had in the day's delay there was the hope it furnished that the rest would brace him up. But on this night he was completely used up, and I was very seriously alarmed by discovering symptoms of deranged kidneys. I did not then know the cause, and attributed it to strain brought on by hard running. In fact, Heming did not tell me, until I stopped off at Hamilton to see him on my way back to New York, that on the day's run to Hart Lake he had fallen over a log and struck on the small of his back. I only knew at that time that any weakness of the kidneys was not to be trifled with, and I felt it would be extremely hazardous to take him on; so I lay down that night to think rather than to sleep.

It was fearfully cold the following morning, with the going growing harder every hour, and I fell behind Heming to watch how he stood up under the effort. I could plainly see he was laboring with great difficulty, and concluded it would be suicidal for him to continue, getting farther from civilization and physicians every mile, so at ten o'clock I called a halt, and expressed my determination to send him home. Heming was loath to turn back, but appreciated his unfitness for the onward journey, and

acquiesced in a decision which must have brought him keenest disappointment.

We had stepped aside for our conference, and I have little doubt "Shot" fancied us planning something for his discomfort, and was much relieved on learning he was to return to La Biche. I decided on "Shot" instead of John, because he understood English enough to administer to Heming's wants in case of his collapse. Then, through "Shot's" interpretation, I had to win John's consent to go on with me, and I experienced a very disquieting half-hour indeed while John underwent the elaborate process of making up his mind. First he refused; then he demurred because he had never been in that part of the country before, and was as dependent on "Shot" for guidance as we were ourselves. And again he objected because he could not speak nor understand a word of English, and I was as deficient in Cree. However, finally he consented if I would give him a few presents, the nature of which I have now forgotten; and after we had eaten, the two Indians set to work dividing the supplies and repacking the sledges. It was not a very elaborate task, and did not take long. We had eaten the last of the potatoes, and so when the bacon and the tea and the flour had been divided, the blankets separated, and Heming and I had indicated which was which of the two seamless sacks that contained our personal luggage, the sledges were packed and the dogs headed in opposite directions.

JOHN

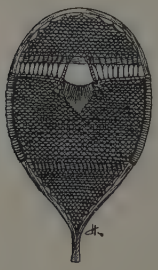
Then we went our separate ways, and I took up my

journey to the great lone land, over a strange country, and without even the poor satisfaction of talking my mother-tongue.

My regret over Heming's falling ill may be better imagined than described. Foremost, of course, I deplored the loss of a companion on a trip which was to extend over 2800 miles; and of less but still considerable concern was the sudden deprivation of a helpmate, upon whose hardihood and experience I had confidently counted. Heming had had abundant snow-shoeing and some dog-sledging, and I set much value on a knowledge that would, to some extent at least, facilitate our venturesome undertaking. And now here I was, just four days out from La Biche, never having had a web snow-shoe on my foot, nor even seen a dog-sledge, with six days of travel over an unknown country between me and Fort McMurray, the next nearest trading-post. However, unpleasant as the prospect was, I had thought it all over the night before as I lay in my blankets after our hard day's run, and realized the situation as completely as I had settled upon my course. But it was not a happy afternoon, that 8th of January, 1895, which saw me, after the separation, trudging onward in cold and in silence.

If I lamented Heming, most assuredly I did not mourn "Shot," notwithstanding his being the only man in the outfit who knew the country across which we were to journey. He had been a sore trial to me from the day of our departure—nay, even from the very hour of our introduction at La Biche—and I confess to honest relief in ridding myself of him, though I was at the time like a ship cast adrift without rudder. Before starting he had deliberately broken his contract, and followed it up by repeated attempts to squeeze more money out of me when he recognized my helplessness and saw my anxiety to get

under way. He exasperated me to such a degree that, knowing an indulgence to my feelings would result in his refusing to go at all, I remember confiding to Heming the great hope that my legs would prove as stout as they had at other times, and enable me to set such a pace as should make "Shot's" tongue hang out before we reached McMurray.



ALGONGI'S SHOES, Lake Temiscamuga, 3 feet long

Whether the pace was too hot or he too lazy I cannot say, but certainly when we were once started he kept me busy urging him to faster gait; his train was invariably so far behind as to delay us ten to fifteen minutes at every "spell" (rest), which meant a loss of from six to eight miles in a day's travel. It must have been laziness, because he is a half-breed of massive bone and great strength and over six feet in height. He evidently thought me a "moonyass," as a "tenderfoot" is called in this country, with whom he could play any game he chose; and when he discovered his mistake he grew sulky, developed a lame knee, subsequently a sore back, and delayed the morning start by his reluctance to turn out when called and the length of time he consumed in packing the sledges. The only day of the four he was with me on which I got him to set off promptly and travel smartly was the last one, when the prospect of reaching a deserted cabin for the night's camp carried him on. I could have forgiven him the lagging behind, for the going was hard, and he had none of the incentive that added nervous to my physical energy, but his avariciousness at La Biche and his sullenness on the road hardened my heart, and I cut out his work on a scale that, I fancy, made the parting between us one for mutual congratulation.

LUXURIOUS CAMPING-GROUND—WOOD PLENTIFUL

And so John and I set out on our journey, neither of us knowing where the morrow might find us, and I with a Cree vocabulary limited to *Namowyah* (No), *Eh-ha* (Yes), *Keepee* (Hurry), *Wah-he-ó-che?* (How far is it?), *Me-wah-sin* (Good). I do not know how many miles we covered the afternoon Heming turned homeward, for I was too thoroughly absorbed in thoughts of what was coming to note the passing, but the camp of that night was, luckily, the best we made on the trip. It was sheltered from the howling wind, wood was plentiful, and with blankets, moccasins, and leggings hung on poles to dry before the blazing logs, might even have been called picturesque, unless that quality may be said to disappear when the mercury registers 40° below zero ten feet from the fire. We were not likely to find so favored a spot another night, and I made John know he should take advantage of the good fire and prepare "bannocks" to last us a few days.

The bannock is simply flour and water and grease thoroughly kneaded and well baked; the usual method of cooking is to shape the dough an inch deep to the inside of a frying-pan, and stand the latter before the camp-fire. The bannock is not beautiful to the eye nor tempting to the fastidious palate; moreover, it never rises superior to that "sadness" which is characteristic of underdone bread the world over. But the bannock is much better suited to the needs of the tripper or *voyageur*, as the snow-shoe traveller is called, than the light yeast bread of the *grand pays* (great world). The bread of civilization is filling, but lacks substance; the bannock has both filling and substance; and when one has nothing to eat but bread and tea and bacon, and is running five miles an hour from sunrise to sunset day after day, substance is a desirable quality. While John made the bannocks, I attended to thawing fish for the dogs; and when we had both finished and

lighted our pipes I undertook to hold my first conversation with him in the language of signs.

The warning most impressed upon me, by all those claiming any knowledge of the country into which I was going, had been against the unreliability of the Indians. I had been told of their tendency to desert under trying conditions, and the little there was to read on the subject emphasized the need of vigilance. That John would grow discouraged, and quietly steal away from the camp some night, was a thought which possessed and worried me considerably. I was prepared to see his dismay as we plodded on in the hard going, and to hear his grumbling, even though I could not understand, but I did not propose, if I could prevent it, awakening one morning to find him and the dogs gone. So I engaged John's attention on this our first night together, and in my best pantomime I tried to make him understand that if he stayed with me to McMurray and was a *me-wah-sin* Indian, I should be a *ne-wah-sin* "moonyass"; but if he deserted me he had better cut my throat before he left camp, as otherwise I should follow his trail and kill him. John looked very wise and serious during my dramatic recital, and I guess he understood me. Whether he did or not, certainly his discouragement in the trying days we had subsequently never reached a mutinous point, and I fully believe he needed no intimidation to be a "*me-wah-sin* Indian." I wondered that night, and as the scene has come up before me many times since I have wondered again, what that Cree must have thought of this white man who was pushing into his country at a time when he himself usually remained in-doors, had pressed him into a service for which he had no liking, and threatened to take his life if he forsook it.

## VI

### FITTING FOR ARCTIC WEATHER

DESPITE our sheltered position and the big fire, I put in an uncomfortable night in this picturesque camp. It was, in fact, the first of many uncomfortable nights before I adjusted my blankets and robes properly. I had ample bedding, and of course could have got warm quickly enough had I used it at all, but that was precisely what I did not want to do. I wished to use the smallest amount of covering possible, and yet be not too uncomfortable to preclude sleep. I did not lose sight of the fact that the cold I was then experiencing was as summer compared with that which I should be obliged to endure in the Barren Grounds. And as I had trained before leaving New York for extreme physical exertion, so now I began fitting myself for excessive cold. Indeed, I am entirely convinced it was my very careful and thorough previous conditioning that enabled me to sustain the starving and freezing to which I was subjected on this (about) six months' trip, and yet come out of it in sound physical condition and without having had a day's sickness. My camping experience had been rather extensive, and was now valuable in suggesting ways of making most out of little. An old campaigner will, simply by his method of wrapping it about him, get as much if not more warmth out of a single blanket than the novice will out of two. Nevertheless, with all my experience, for the first week I

shivered and shook in the bedding I permitted myself, and the temptation to add one more blanket was almost irresistible.

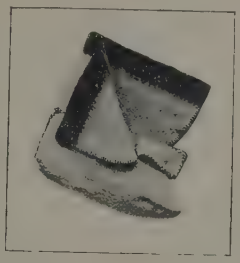
Not that the atmosphere was colder than I had before experienced, for 40° below is by no means uncommon in the Rocky Mountains, where I have camped, but the wind made me so miserable. It blew more than half the

POLE LODGE IN WHICH MOOSE AND CARIBOU SKINS ARE SMOKED

time, and nothing could resist its searchings. It went straight through capotes, leggings, and blankets, and made sleep impossible for me several nights on the way to McMurray. The dogs, however, seemed unmindful of either wind or cold. At night, after they had eaten their fish, they went a few yards from the fire, scratched away a little of the top snow, and then curled up, back to windward. In the morning when they were dragged to harness they left the outline of their body in the snow, and

a well-defined depression, which sometimes even showed the ground. Nothing but fur can insure warmth or even comfort in this chilling North. Farther along, and before making my bison or musk-ox hunt, I secured a caribou-skin capote with the fur on, but until I got one I was a shivering victim of the wind, for the capote I had fetched from Hamilton, Canada, was useless. Having been made of unsmoked leather, the first snow-storm soaked and the fire shrank it; then it was too heavy to run in, and the blanket lining for warmth was greatly inferior to fur. No garment can excel the caribou capotes made by the Indians for exposure in the excessive cold and piercing winds of this North country. They are very light, and do not therefore add to the burden of the *voyageur*, while being literally impervious to all winds, save those deadly blasts of the Barren Grounds.

The Indian tripper in winter first secures stout moccasins and new "duffel," and next looks to his caribou-skin capote. Anything may answer for trousers or head covering, the former, indeed, being moose or caribou skin, blanket, or "store pants" got at the Hudson's Bay Company post in trade, while the conventional hat is supplied by a colored handkerchief wound about the head, just above the forehead and ears, to keep the long hair in place. Formerly it was, and still is in the more remote sections, a moose or caribou thong bound by sinew and decorated with porcupine quill. But the foot-covering must be of the best. Moccasins are made of smoked moose-skin, because



NORTHWEST SOCK OF DUFFEL

of its thickness (though the thinner caribou-skin is equally durable), and are really the pride of the Indian wardrobe. They are the most, and very frequently the only, decorated piece of his apparel; in presentation they are the vehicle of regard from one Indian to another; they carry the first tidings of a more tender sentiment from the maiden to the young hunter, and are the surest indication not only of the degree of the woman's handiwork, but, if she be married, of the degree of her regard for the husband.

An Indian's moccasins are a walking advertisement of his standing at home. Blessed is the civilized world insomuch as its wives are not its bootmakers!

I was not long in reading aright the signs of the moccasins, and ever after, when I required any made at the posts, first sought acquaintance with the husband before ordering. No doubt many a pair of shoes I scrutinized did not represent the best work of the poor devil's wife, but I found them at least accurate in determining his importance within his own tepee. Moccasin decoration, in fact, practically all Northland Indian ornamentation, is done in beads, in porcupine quill, or in silk embroidery. Silk-work is of somewhat recent introduction, confined entirely to half-breeds, and although rather well executed, is the least effective. The French half-breeds are largely responsible for the flower-pattern bead embroidery, which is the vogue all over the northern part of this country. One sees moccasins, mittens, leggings, garters (which, by the way, only the men wear), all in patterns copied from nature, and therefore somewhat noteworthy, but not nearly so strik-

INDIAN SLIPPERS

ing as the pure Indian designs of the more southerly tribes.

The porcupine-quill work is truly Indian, and, at its best, exceedingly striking, both in design and coloring, though only the most skilful can do it acceptably, for each tiny quill, after dyeing, is woven in separately, and the weaver's ingenuity or lack of it is revealed in the design. The best specimens of this work are seen in the women's belts, though it is put on moccasins, shirts, skirts, gun-coats, as well as on the birch-bark baskets called rogans, and used for every purpose. "Duffel" is a thick blanket stuff, which, together with "strouds," a similar though more closely spun material, the Hudson's Bay Company introduced and christened. Duffel is used for socks and strouds for leggings, and both are manufactured expressly for the trade in this country. Leggings are used as much to keep the trousers from becoming ice coated during the day's snow-shoeing as for warmth. At night they are removed, and thus your blankets are kept comparatively free of snow. The Indian gets his duffel by the yard, and when he has cut it into strips about six inches wide by eighteen inches long his socks are completed. Their adjustment is equally simple, for he has only to begin at the toes and wind the piece throughout its length about the foot. The half-breed takes his duffel home, where it is shaped and sewed into crude socks, and if his wife thinks well of him, and is clever, she will vary them in size (as two or three pairs are worn at a time inside the moccasin), and fancy-stitch them in colored yarn. I tried both styles of sock, and prefer the Indian's simpler kind; it is more quickly thawed out and dried at night; if one end wears or burns, it may be rearranged so a good part covers the toes and heel—the most important to keep from freezing. Besides, you can fit it more snugly, which

is, I think, its greatest advantage, because, if you do not happen to have a wife to direct, or, having one, do not stand high in her estimation, your socks will be of the same size, and all too large. Consequently your feet will slip about, which is most tiresome in long and hard walking, and the socks will freeze into wrinkles, and when your snow-shoe strings have also become frozen they will cut your toes and instep, and very likely cripple you eventually. While your moccasins and socks should fit snug, they must not be tight, and your mittens large enough to be drawn easily over hands already encased in loose, stout gloves. Nothing should fit tight in the Northland, otherwise your chances of freezing are much greater.

A WOMAN'S PORCUPINE-QUILL BELT

The denial I practised in the matter of blankets proved doubly advantageous. It conditioned me so that very soon I slept soundly and comfortably, and it proved a blessing to John, to whom I gave of my surplus. He was very glad to get the additional blanket, and I never encountered an Indian throughout my trip who was not thankful for any extra covering, even a coat, that I let him have. This is apropos of the declaration made to the venturer into this country that the Indians scorn more than one blanket. I heard it on all sides. "What! two pairs of blankets? Why, the Indians," etc., etc. When these Indians sleep under one blanket it is because they have no second,

NOONDAY TEA

nor do they keep warm "in the coldest nights." The contrary is all miserable boasting. My experience convinced me they could stand no greater cold than I; when it was merely discomforting they were more indifferent to it than a white man, for the very good reason that while the white man has always been well clothed and fed and protected, the red man has been half clothed and fed and never protected. Naturally the latter does not mind exposures that are somewhat trying on first experience to the former. For instance, in sitting about camp, the Indians, as a rule, wore the same coat in which they had been running, whereas I found a heavier one more comfortable. It was not that the Indians were warm, but they were used to discomfort. I wrapped up less than they when snow-shoeing, but more than they in camp. When it came to withstanding the fearful cold and withering storms of the Barren Grounds, my endurance was as great, and my suffering, judging from appearances, not so much as theirs. This is because this particular Indian has no heart, no nervous energy, no reserve force. Confronted by the unexpected or inexplicable, he gives no urgency to his efforts; he seeks no solution; he simply gives up. He has none of that do-or-die sentiment; he prefers to die. Dump an Indian and a bound white man into a snow-bank, and the latter would probably freeze to death first, but in a struggle for existence under any conditions the white man would go farther and keep going longer than the red man.

As to the bedding question, when I was on my homeward journey in May I noted Indians sleeping under the same number of blankets they had used while I was making my way towards Great Slave Lake in January. What did surprise me at first, however, was the toughness of

their feet. I marvelled how they could sleep with them sticking out from under the blankets, with no other protection from the cold than that furnished by the duffel and moccasin. I ceased to wonder once I had viewed the quarter-inch layer of epidermis on the heels and soles.

## VII

### BLIND LEADING THE BLIND

THERE is some comfort in the reflection that John and I had a good camp that first night we were alone, for there was bitterness enough in store for us in the next four days. To begin with, it was impossible for me to wear snow-shoes in breaking trail for the dogs, although the snow was nearly knee-deep and the going heavy, because I had never used a web snow-shoe before, and consequently was not sufficiently expert to feel the McMurray trail under the foot and a half of snow—and to follow this trail by feeling it was our only means of guidance. Then our bacon was about out, and we had but one meal of fish for the dogs. Therefore I was not hilarious when we started off at four in the morning in a blinding snowstorm. "Shot" had told me something of the nature of the country over which the trail led, but the country was all alike to us in that storm. I know we went through woods, for several times I fell heavily against a tree, but nothing was visible except on closest inspection. My senses were all concentrated on feeling that trail, and my energies directed to weathering the storm, whose fury was beginning to be the more perceptible as the day dawned, when suddenly I dropped through space—I thought at the time about twenty feet, but I guess it was not more than ten—and the dogs and the sledge and John fell on top of me. When we had disentangled ourselves I had a

more puzzling situation to unravel in determining where we were.

I felt sure I had not lost the trail, but corroboration was out of the question, because the road made by our dogs and sledge rendered feeling the underlying old one that had guided me impossible. Going ahead a little distance, I found we were on a lake, but could discover no trail, and the storm made travelling by landmarks impossible even had I known any, which, of course, I did not. John's search for a trail proved no happier than mine, and then he wanted to camp; but I exhausted upon him two-thirds of my Cree vocabulary in "*namowyàh*" (no) and "*keepee*" (hurry), and we made a wider circuit with no better success. This time he was determined to camp; and the sleet was cutting our faces, and the dogs were howling, and it was miserable. But we didn't camp. Again I made a cast, and this time for a find. I was sure of a piece of trail, but whence it came and whither it went I could not determine. The snow was either blown away or packed so hard it was simply impossible to follow a trail for any distance. We travelled a little way only to lose it and begin our searching anew; another find, followed closely by a check and yet another heart-breaking cast. And thus, how many miles I know not, we worked our way across that Jack Fish Lake in the teeth of a storm that whirled around us unceasingly, and it was one o'clock when we crawled up the bank and discovered a cabin which I knew must be the one where "Shot" had said I could get fish.

We got our dogs on the leeward side, and then staggered into the cabin, covered from head to foot by ice and numb with cold. The house was full of Indians, but there was no exclamation of surprise upon our appearance. Half-frozen men are of too common occurrence in

the Northland to create comment. They made way for us at the fire, of which we did not immediately avail ourselves—for we both had frozen ears and noses—and they pushed the teakettle nearer the glowing coals: but no one uttered a sound, though they eyed me with ill-concealed curiosity. By-and-by, when we had thawed out, John and I drank tea and ate a slice of bacon from our scanty stock, and then I signed him to get fish for the dogs: but much talking was followed only by sullen silence, and no fish were forthcoming. Fish we must have. As I sat pondering over the situation I discovered a fiddle hanging against the wall, and thought an excellent opportunity offered of trying the power of music to soothe the savage breast, so I handed the instrument to John, whom I had heard play at La Biche, and what with his fiddling and my distribution of tobacco, it was not very long before we had the Indians jabbering again, and two days' fish for the dogs.

The wind was still howling and the snow falling when we started on an hour later, against the protestations of the Indians, who wanted us and our tea and tobacco to remain overnight: but our supplies were too low to warrant their consumption in idleness, and we had put another eight or nine miles behind us before we made a wretched camp in the muskeg, with scarcely wood enough to make a fire, and not a level spot to throw down our blankets. It cleared up during the night, and when we broke camp the next morning at four the moon shone as serenely as though it had not yielded to a greater and fiercer power the night before. Before daybreak the trail ran into some rather open woods, through which the moon's soft light played with wondrously fantastic effect, and when the first streaks of yellow in the northeast heralded the rising of the sun, we had left the shadow of the

trees and were travelling in the muskeg. I shall always remember that morning as giving me the most beautiful picture I ever beheld in Nature's album: the sun coming up on my right, the moon going down on my left—one bursting forth in all his golden splendor, while the other slowly withdrew her silvery light. And between and far below the two heavenly rivals plodded John and the dogs and I, footsore and hungry, but appreciative.

I was destined to be brought to earth very suddenly and somewhat ingloriously, for the sun had but just dispelled the gray gloom of early morning, and I was clipping along at a merry gait across the deadly muskeg, with a large lake in sight, and John and the dogs not far behind, when down I tumbled in a heap with a sprained ankle. Sitting in the snow chafing my ankle was not going to bring us food nor get me to the Barren Grounds, so I wound moose-skin tightly about the injured part, and took my place again before the dogs. At first I could not stand without the aid of a stout stick, and we made headway so slowly that after a few miles I threw away my crutch, and in a determination to try the power of mind over matter limped on.

I should not advise Christian scientists to put their faith to such a test; no convert was ever more open to conviction than I—spirit willing, mind receptive, but the flesh so mortally weak that every time I put down my left foot it gave way to the knee. And so, faith failing, I vowed to get on in the only way remaining. After a while the pain grew duller, and, my leg giving under me, I discovered the tight binding and the cold had frozen the flesh. As I could not navigate without the support of the moose-skin binding, and a frozen ankle, though less painful, held me up not so well as a twisted one, I was thereafter occupied quite as much in keeping that ankle alive in all its painful sensitiveness as I was in keeping it going at

all. We held our way, however, and the lake I had sighted proved to be Big White Fish, where I traded some tobacco for fish for the dogs, but could get none to eke out the little bacon now left us.

Here I had my first view of the manner in which these fish are hung upon stagings—first to dry, subsequently to

DRYING FISH—THE STAPLE FOOD OF MAN AND DOG

freeze, and ever to be beyond the reach of the always half-starved dogs. There are other stagings, combining larder and storehouse for the Indian, and more necessary than his lodge, where he puts his meat, fresh pelts, snow-shoes, and sledges. Snow-shoes and sledges do not sound palatable, but the caribou-skin lacings of the former and moose wrapper and lines of the latter make quite a succulent dish, as meals go in this land of feast or famine. Every Indian cabin or lodge has its staging, and all things eatable are hung upon it for safety. And it is here the dogs do congregate to voice their hunger in mournful howling,

and vent their frenzied disappointment in furious fighting. Indian dogs spend most of their time fighting; when it is not one another, it is against death by starvation.

If I failed of increasing our supplies at this settlement, I did get a map, which at least aimed to show me the way to plenty. It was a puzzling creation, that map, which one of the Indians drew in my note-book to give us some idea of the direction of the trail across the six lakes that lay between us and the next Indian camp on White Fish Lake. Once at White Fish Lake, and we had but fifteen miles to John MacDonald's, on Big Jack Fish Lake, the McMurray fishery, and home of one of the best-known *voyageurs* in the country. But Big Jack Fish Lake was two days' travel away, and meanwhile my ankle made life intolerable, and the map proved more maddening than the fifteen puzzle. We made only seven miles the afternoon of the day I sprained my ankle; we had covered twenty up to noon; but after my rest I could barely move along, and besides we were continually falling foul of trails, which appeared coming from everywhere and went nowhere. All this and the following day we travelled over muskeg, particularly severe on me now, with an ankle so tender, and really only one foot with which to feel the road. But, after all, the muskeg was kinder to us than the lakes, for when we reached these we invariably lost the trail, to find and as speedily lose it again, while it was absolutely impossible to judge from its direction where it eventually left the lake. Indians never by any chance travel straight. Thoughout the (about) 900 miles of trail I followed from Edmonton to Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake, there is but the single exception of the Slave Lake portage; for the rest, it looks as though the original traveller had sat up all night at Edmonton with a "sick friend" and a barrel, and then started to walk home. At

best its windings are hard to follow, but when one may advance only by feeling, its difficulties become tenfold, and yet it is remarkable how skilled one becomes in this method of procedure. I grew sufficiently expert after a time, and when there was good bottom to the trail, to follow it running, about a five-mile-per-hour gait, though there was literally no indication on the snow's surface of a trail beneath.

Added to the misery of bodily ailment, the map distracted me by its deceptions. The lengths of lines drawn by the Indian to represent the portages between the lakes gave no indication of the comparative distances. The first "line" was short, and we covered it in a couple of hours; the next one was about the same length, but we were half a day crossing the country between the two lakes it joined; the third line was fully four times as long as the longer of the other two, yet we were only half an hour going from end to end of it.

And every little while, when a lost or blind trail dismayed us, and we cast about to find our true course, we looked at each other, John and I, and pitied one another for living. We could not exchange ideas; we could not have the poor comfort of debating the situation; we could only make a few imperfect signs, which expressed little to the point, and seemed frivolous in the face of a situation so desperate. Once our leading dog, who is always called a foregoer, found the trail on the lake, and showed remarkable sagacity, which, by-the-way, we trusted to our sorrow later. This time, however, he came to our rescue when we were utterly lost; he ceased following the imaginary trail I was hobbling along, and, after a few casts, settled to a steady gait in another direction. John also thought he had a trail, which he endeavored to persuade the dogs into following, but the foregoer held his

way, and when we investigated we found he had really the only trail of the three. The snow was deeper on this part of our route, which made the walking yet harder; but by one way or another we finally crossed the six lakes shown on the Indian's map, and came to White Fish Lake. Here we managed to get just a meal of fish for the dogs, but none for ourselves, to which, however, we had become accustomed. We rested two hours, while I bathed my feet, much to the wonderment of the natives, to whom it seemed an unaccountable waste of energy, and rubbed my ankle with some of the mustang liniment I had fetched along from La Biche. There were but fourteen miles between us and John MacDonald's cabin, on Big Jack Fish Lake, when we set out again at two o'clock; and the prospect of talking again, and having a roof over my head, nerved me to faster pace. I was destined to see neither MacDonald nor his house that night. Some Indians had recently travelled between the two lakes, so there was a faint trail, which we followed at so good a gait it was not dark when we came to where the road led out on to Big Jack Fish Lake. But by this time a fierce storm had set in, with snow which completely shut off our view twenty feet distant, and wind that swept away the last semblance of a trail. I tried to feel out the road, then John tried, and then we gave the foregoer his head; and, sure enough, he went off at a rate which convinced us he must have found something. And so he had; but we were not seeking the road he found. We travelled about ten miles to get that knowledge.

There is a point which makes out from the north shore of the lake and divides it into two large bays. MacDonald's cabin is on the western bay. I supposed John knew it was. We had held an animated though not entirely successful conversation at White Fish, which I intended

MEETING OF TWO DOG BRIGADES.

should express my wish that he learn the distance, etc. The Cree for "How far is it?" is "*Wah-he-ó-che*"; for "It is far," you drop only the "*che*," and say "*Wah-he-ó.*" But I was not then so learned. So I had asked John, "*Wah-he-ó-che*—MacDonald's?" and John had replied—after some discussion with the other Indians—"*Wah-he-ó.*" I supposed him correcting me, and as this particular Cree query was my *pièce de résistance*, "*Wah-he-o-ché*"—with an accent on the "*ché*"—again resounded in the chilly air, and again he retorted, "*Wah-he-ó.*" Then we *wah-he-o-ché'd* and *wah-he-ó'd* until each subsided in silence and disgust at the other's stupidity.

And so we travelled down the eastern bay of Big Jack Fish Lake.

It got dark by the time we were well out on the lake; we could not have seen our way in broad daylight, because the snow was thickly falling and the wind savagely blowing as we trustingly followed our foregoer. By-and-by I decided we must be going wrong, for I thought the cabin could not be so far off as we had come, and I got John and the dogs turned about to go back and into the western bay. The storm was now squarely in our teeth, and the dogs would not face it. They kept turning and entangling themselves in the harness, while we were faint with hunger and benumbed with cold, and my ankle seemed bursting with pain.

I made the nearest approach I could in the storm to a bee-line for the point, and then followed it around. I had not the remotest idea where MacDonald's house was, but I knew I should have to find it in the morning to get my bearings; so after we had gone about as far down the western bay as we had into the eastern, we camped under a pine-tree, where wood was plentiful, and ate a piece of bacon each and drank a cup of tea, after a hard day's

tramp—which my pedometer registered as forty-four miles. Our dogs ate the last of their fish, John and I were on half-allowance of the poor rations we had, we were lost, and it did not seem as if my ankle would permit me to walk another step. The world was not very bright when we camped.

As we sat silently drinking our tea we heard something approaching, and instantly alert, with that protective and hunter's instinct which comes to the traveller of the wilds, listened intently, until we discovered the swishing, grating of a snow-shoe heel. It was Kipling, a famous Soto Indian runner, who had come to invite me to MacDonald's cabin, where, but a mile beyond, they had seen our campfire. James Spencer, the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge of McMurray, had brought thus far on its journey the one winter packet that reaches the railroad from this isolated wilderness, and was returning the next morning early. Here was good news indeed, and good luck—the first of my trip. But John had stuck by me, and I would not leave him on the conclusion of so hard a day; therefore I sent my grateful thanks to Spencer, saying I should be on hand the following morning. And so the clouds rolled away, and the worry within and the storm without ceased as I lay down to sleep that night.

It was a very lively scene at MacDonald's next morning, and a most interesting one to me; for the packet was starting on its last stage, and as to carry it is one of the few honors in the country, the dogs were handsomer and more gayly harnessed than any I had seen.

It was only seventy miles to McMurray, but the two days we consumed in getting there were most trying, and I shall never forget the ten-mile crossing of Swan Lake the first morning. We camped for dinner midway, on an island, but it seemed as though I should never

"Old" Jacob François

MY OUTFIT FROM McMURRAY TO CHIPEWYAN
From a Photograph by the author

reach it; and a mirage added confusion by placing it now near by and then far away, and all the time the hard ice made running particularly torturing to my ankle. The tea was made by the time I finally put my foot on that island. It was exceedingly hard going for men and dogs all the way to McMurray, for the trail led down Clear Water River, on which the supplies in early days were brought into the country, and the snow was deep. We were all worn, and I was thankful indeed when the light of Spencer's cabin pierced the darkness and I knew I had put 240 miles of my long journey behind me.

How I relished a good wash and a satisfying meal I shall not attempt to say; few of my readers have gone without either or both, and could not appreciate my feelings. Nor could I adequately express my gratitude to Spencer and his wife for their unceasing kindness. I spent one day at McMurray, which is located at the junction of the Clear Water and Athabasca rivers, doctoring my ankle and awaiting fresh dogs and guides; for here John and his dogs, after a rest, turned back. If Spencer had been of Gairdner's sort I should have been delayed again, for none of the Indians took kindly to the trip on to Chipewyan, the next post. Those that had promised backed out, and finally Spencer turned over to me the train which had brought the packet from Chipewyan to McMurray. There were four good strong dogs; François, a French half-breed, one of the best dog-drivers and runners in the land; and "Old" Jacob, a Soto Indian, to break trail, who as young Jacob was famous for strength and speed, and even now could beat all but the very best on snow-shoes. Both could talk and understand enough English to make some sort of conversation possible, and both knew the road, so that the clouds revealed only their silver lining as we started out from McMurray.

I was not seeking trouble, but it came just the same. I had never worn moccasins until I left La Biche. I had never used the web snow-shoe until I left McMurray, and therefore the second day out my feet were so blistered and lacerated by the lacings that blood dyed my duffel, and walking was agony. Hitherto I had been counting my progress by days; now I reckoned by the fires, of which we made three daily, when we drank tea and my misery enjoyed a brief respite. It was cold, bitterly cold, and the wind swept up the Athabasca River, down which we travelled, apparently coming directly from the north pole. But neither wind nor painful travelling nor hunger, which we experienced the last two days, delayed us, and when we finally reached the shores of Lake Athabasca, and viewed the Hudson's Bay Company fortlike post four miles away, it was like a sight of the promised land. I had been twenty days on the road, and come about 580 miles from the railroad, so that, what with lacerated feet, twisted ankle, and fatigue, I was pretty well used up when I passed through the gateway of Fort Chipewyan.

FORT CHIPEWYAN

## VIII

### THE NORTHLAND INDIAN AS HE IS

CHIPEWYAN has many claims to distinction. Built substantially upon one of the numerous rocky points which break the one hundred and fifty miles of Athabasca Lake's north-shore line, it is the most picturesquely situated and most populous oasis in this silent white country. It is headquarters of one of the four districts into which this vast fur-bearing land of one million square miles is divided by the Hudson's Bay Company; the chief forwarding-point for the merchandise which the company sends in for trade, and the fur the Indians send out as pay; a general distributing post-office of the four yearly mails which reach this land, where man is but a mere track upon the snow, and not above one hundred of the roughly approximated ten thousand read English writing. It is the most important Northland mission of the Roman Catholic Oblates Fathers, and it is practically the northern boundary of the Cree and the southern boundary of the Montagnaise Indian family, which in its various branches spreads towards the Arctic Ocean.

Nothing commanded my earnest attention more completely than this mission of the Oblates Fathers, with its bishop, three brothers, six nuns, forty school-children, and a saw-mill. Here, hundreds of miles from skilled labor, they have whipped out the planks for their church, invented a written language, somewhat after the Egyptian

in character, taught it with slight modifications to both Chipewyan and Cree, printed and bound the Testaments and the Bible for distribution, and gone out into the woods to hunt their meat, and to suffer from cold, perhaps

Caribou-Eater Yellow-Knife Caribou-Eater

TYPES OF NORTHLAND INDIANS
From a Photograph by Mr. Whitney

to starve, along with the Indians to whom they would preach the Word of God. I care not whether one's form of belief be for or against the doctrine preached by these men, one must be petty indeed who cannot rise above religious prejudices and respect these workers, that, east and west, north and south, have gone far in advance of the pioneer, far beyond the plaudits of civilization, to carry their faith into the very heart of the wilderness.

I am sure Dr. W. M. Mackay, the Hudson Bay Company officer in charge, and his right and left bowers, "Ned" Camsell and "Sam" Emerson, would consider that I had

slighted Chipewyan if I failed to record the further eminence it enjoys in having two streets. I was never able, unaided, to discover more than the one which separates the post's dozen log cabins from the lake, but that may have been due to the deflection of my compass needle. At all events, after McMurray, with its four cabins, it seemed metropolitan, though of its "census" of four hundred men, women, and children only a small percentage is in actual residence. This is equally true of all the posts.

The real dwellers within the settlements are a comparative handful, comprising chiefly the mission people, the company servants, and a few "freemen," as those who have served their five years' enlistment and set up a little independency of labor are called. Those that live within the company's gates are chiefly half-breeds. In summer they catch and dry the fish which forms the chief article of food for men and dogs, or work on the company flatboats; and in winter they spend the short days in "tripping," and the long nights in smoking and talking about their dogs, or in dancing and sleeping. They have no other diversions; no in-door games, no out-door sports. Dancing and sleeping are the beginning and ending of their recreation, and I would not venture an opinion as to the more popular; certainly they have an abnormal capacity for either.

MAN'S SHOE, Canadian Snow-Shoe Club, 3½ feet long

This applies to the men. Life is a more serious affair for the women. They too sleep and dance and smoke, but their sleeping comes as a well-earned respite after the day's toil; their dancing has the outward appearance of a sacrifice, to which they are silently resigned, and smoking is an accompaniment to work rather than a diversion in

itself. The woman is the country drudge. Her work is never finished. She chops the firewood, dries the fish and meat, snares rabbits, and carries her catch into the post on her back; scrapes and tans the moose and caribou hides, from the latter of which she afterwards makes *babiche* (Northland string) by cutting it into strips an eighth of an inch wide; laces the snow-shoes, makes and embroiders with beads the mittens, moccasins, and leggings; yields the lion's share of the scanty larder to her husband when he is at home luxuriating in smoke and sleep, and, when he is away, gives her children her tiny *pret* (allowance) of fish and goes hungry without a murmur.

This is the woman of the post. She of the woods, the full-blooded squaw, and there are few Indians that ever take up a permanent abode in the settlement, does all this and more. In addition to chopping the firewood, she seeks and hauls it; not only dries, but catches the fish; goes after and quarters and brings in the game her master has killed; breaks camp, and pitches it again where the husband, who has gone on ahead with no load but his gun and no thought except for the hunt, and whose trail she has followed, indicates by sticking up brush in the snow. When there is plenty she makes her meal on that which her lord leaves, and when there is little she starves, along with her children and the dogs.

When in her periodical state she dare not cross the snow-shoe tracks of the men, nor even follow in their steps. She must make her own path. And when she gives birth to her child it is in a lodge by herself, unattended and apart from the others. If at the time she is with a travelling band she steps aside to pitch her lodge, and next morning mayhap, with the new-born babe added to her other burdens, she goes on after the Indians that have not tarried.

CHIPEWYAN, ON ATHABASCA LAKE, THE LARGEST POST IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

The Indian is the sybarite of the Northland, and the only genuine socialist on earth. He holds all the possessions of his country equally with his tribe, feasts and fasts and sorrows and rejoices in common, and roams where his legs carry and his gun provides. When there is abundance he smokes his pipe in happy indolence, and his wife does the work; when there is no meat for the kettle he shoulders his gun and goes out into the woods, leaving care and hunger at home with the squaw. But he does not invariably escape hunger. It is ever a feast or a famine with him, and it might always be a feast were he not so improvident and lazy. Clothing and food are at his very door. In the rivers and lakes there is fish in great quantity and variety; along their banks, fisher, otter, mink, beaver, and muskrat; and in the forests, moose, caribou, bear, lynx, fox, wolf, wolverene, marten, ermine, and rabbits—to say nothing of the early spring and autumn migrations of ducks and geese, the packs of ptarmigan, which in their changing plumage of brown and white are to be seen summer and winter, and the several other species of the grouse family that may be found the greater part of the year. There is no occasion for an Indian to starve in this country, if he keeps out of the Barren Grounds; but hunting demands skill, of which he has less than any other red man I ever knew, and a never-failing cache presupposes foresight, of which he has none —so that, in truth, he fasts more often than he feasts.

Snow-shoe running, packing, and canoeing are the three most resourceful fields of the Indian story-teller; and of the three, running affords him greatest scope for his peculiar imagination.

The Indian of the Northland is neither an ingenious nor a picturesque Munchausen. He is just a plain liar, who seems not even to count on the credulity of his

hearer for acceptance of his tales. He lies by choice rather than from necessity, and should the necessity occur he makes a virtue of his lying. Nor is he abashed if discovered. Really I believe he views every plain statement as a lost opportunity. Every camp-fire, every meeting at the post, invariably becomes an excuse for the discussion

THE NORTHLAND SHOEMAKER

of dogs and the recital of astonishing feats of snow-shoe running. The fact that no one of the assemblage ever did or ever could perform the extraordinary feats recounted does not detract a particle from the quality of the story or its enjoyment by the listeners. It's a case of the man with the last story having the best of it. Still, with all his vainglorious talk, the Indian is an unhesitating admirer of real prowess, and good runners are indeed

plentiful in this country, where shanks' mare is the only mount.

To be a good dog-driver and to run forty miles a day is to be a great man in this land of vast distances. There are instances where men have gone farther, but in most cases the going has been exceptional, or the "day" stretched far into the night. In my effort to obtain authenticated information on big runs I found the "day" most elastic, extending, in fact, the full twenty-four hours, from midnight to midnight, and the "running" of the man to include riding on the sledge now and then when the going was extra good. The best day of actual running I was able to corroborate was sixty miles, done between 6 A.M. and 5.30 P.M. by Alexander Linkletter, an English-Cree half-breed now at Chipewyan, who made two fires *en route*. Another half-breed covered eighty miles between midnight and nine o'clock of the next night, and an Indian went seventy miles between 3 A.M. and 8 P.M., but these are notable chiefly because of the dogs' endurance, for both men rode most of the distance, and neither approaches the performance of Linkletter, who ran every foot of the way.

The condition of the going makes so great a difference in travelling that thirty miles on one occasion might easily be a more notable performance than fifty miles on another. Taking the average conditions of tripping, from twenty-five to thirty miles is considered a fair day, thirty-five miles a good day, and forty a big day's work. The *voyageur* considers he is travelling well if he makes two fires during the day, at which he drinks tea, and sleeps thirty or thirty-five miles nearer his destination every night. Spring is popularly spoken of as the time when "the days are long and the dogs go well," and you travel longer and farther each day. But as a matter of fact the

season has little to do with the length of time spent on the road if you are making a long journey and time is an object. Indeed, to me the days always seemed long enough, and the dogs to go well enough. In winter you start at three, make your first fire at seven, start again at eight, which is just about daybreak, having a second fire at eleven, and camp at three, which gives about an hour before dark to cut a supply of firewood. In spring it is daylight long before you start at six, and long after you camp at eight; in fact, in May I wrote in my note-book frequently at ten, and it was not really dark at midnight. In midsummer there is no night, and in midwinter the short days are of slight significance to the tripper, because the moon equalizes matters by shining full throughout the period in which the sun shines least.

SQUAW LEGGING

I have said that Chipewyan is the practical dividing-point between two great Indian families, but the traveller who did not hear their speech, which is altogether dissimilar in intonation and word, would not appreciate it. There is no very noticeable outward distinction between the Cree and the Chipewyan Indian, except possibly the face of the latter is broader. Otherwise they have about the same physical characteristics — high cheek-bones, large mouth, African nose, dirty yellowish-ochre complexion, coarse, straight black hair, and sparse mustache seen occasionally. They are never corpulent, and never clean. Ethically there is no choice between them: their capacity and prejudice for lying are equal, and one is as untrust-

worthy as the other. Generally speaking, neither the men nor the women are good to look upon; but of course there are exceptions to every rule, and I think the exceptions in this case are more often Cree. The half-breeds are generally more agreeable to the eye; some of the women are even good-looking; and one of them, a daughter of Michael Manderville, the interpreter at Great Slave Lake, has excellent features, a sweet expression, and is quite the belle of the north country, though the wives of Spencer and of Chipewyan François press her very closely for the honor.

As to philological differences, they are too intricate to understand without long study, and too many for exploitation here. It will answer our purpose to know that the Cree nation is one of the largest of the Lenni-Lennappe family, itself the most widely distributed of the three great divisions—Floridean, Iroquois, and Lenni-Lennappe.

PAPPOOSE IN ITS MOSS BAG

The Cree is really a plains Indian, and as such superior to the few of the family in the Northland who are called Wood Cree. The Tené, or Montagnaise, is the great nation which spreads between the Rocky Mountains and Hudson's

Bay, and extends in its various tribes and dialects down to the arctic. Of these tribes the chief are Chipewyan, Yellow-Knives, Dog-Ribs, Slaveys, Hare, Caribou-Eaters, whose language has mere dialectic differences. Then there are the Loucheux, on the Mackenzie River, which have a more distinct tongue, sharper features, almond-shaped eyes, and are the most intelligent and thrifty Indians in the country; and the Eskimo, that never hunt more than a hundred miles south of the arctic coast, have their own variation of the Eskimo speech, and, notably enough, average of greater stature than is commonly believed of this people.

Missionaries have now reached all these tribes from the different Hudson's Bay Company posts, and their labors have been rewarded by the outward acceptance of their doctrines by a large number of the Indians that come into the forts to trade. The French half-breeds, and certainly seventy-five per cent. of the converted Indians, have adopted the Roman Catholic faith; the remainder have been won over to the Protestants. The most tangible evidences of church influence thus far seen are in the very general disappearance of the medicine-man and the suppression of polygamy and incest. So far as I could learn, the Indians never had any defined worship. Their religion was and is one of fear. They are ever propitiating the bad spirits, the demons of their dreams, and the imaginary "enemy" of the woods. I have seen burned leggings, worn-out moccasins, and broken snow-shoes hung up as peace sacrifices to change bad luck in hunting or a head-wind in tripping, and I never failed to note the predominant avarice stronger than the superstition, as revealed by the worthless character of the offerings. They lean to an inferior species of "totemism," although no religious ceremony was ever attached to its acceptance. Any animal or bird dreamed

of used to be, and is yet in a minor degree, taken as the dreamer's totem. The medicine-man has gone, but has left the old superstitions and the pronounced fatalism, which the missionaries have not succeeded in destroying.

They conform to the ceremonies of religion, but little of true Christianity has been developed. It has been a

THE BELLE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY

change of method rather than of heart. Formerly female babies were killed on birth; now they live to become beasts of burden. Parents used to be strangled when they grew too old to seek a living; now they are left to slowly starve to death. In days gone by men openly exchanged wives for a shorter or longer period; now the

number of virtuous girls is very small, and wise indeed is the son who knows his father in this vale of unconventionality. The dead used to be swung in trees or hung from four posts, where the wind rocked them in their eternal sleep; now they are buried in shallow graves, and the wolverene guards them by day and feeds on them by night.

Priests have not yet taught the Indians the Golden Rule, nor implanted respect for virginity. Chastity is regarded as a virtue to be honored in the breach rather than in the observance, and fidelity seems by no means essential to the happiness of wedded life.

The birth of "such a little one" to the unmarried girl is no barrier to her marital prospects, and wifely faithlessness never leads to any passage at arms more serious than a little hair pulling. Nor are the dispositions of these people amatory.

The men are impelled by that instinct of conquest which rules in the male the world over, and makes of him an iconoclastic and a selfish brute.

The women, in their low plane of semi-civilization, know nothing of nature's or cupid's mating, and yields from love of gain rather than from warmth of constitution.

These people have not ventured far into civilization. Take from the Indian his copper kettle, steel knife, and .30-bore muzzle-loading gun, in which he uses ball in winter and shot in summer, and give him his bow, his birch-bark "rogan," moose-bone, beaver-tooth, and flint-stone knives, and he is just about where he was when the Hudson's Bay Company brought the trinkets of the great world to him. Agricultural knowledge is of no use to him, because his country is not susceptible of cultivation, except in a few rare and isolated spots. And there are

no native industries of any description, no weaving of blankets, no making of jewelry or pottery, absolutely nothing beyond some indifferent beading and porcupine-quill work, which is done by several other tribes, and most notably by the Navajos in New Mexico.

As for sentiment, they have none beyond that torporific bliss caused by a full stomach. Yes, they have one other—fear. They are abject cowards. In an earlier chapter I spoke of a gift of moccasins conveying indication of a tender sentiment; but that sentiment is relative. The men marry to have some one to make moccasins for them, and the women marry because, poor things, they have little choice in the matter, and that little probably suggests it is better to be the servant of one man than the drudge of a family. There are no playful displays of maternal affection. I think I saw just one instance of the kind on my trip; and, on the other hand, I saw one young mother take her crying and moss-bag-enveloped baby out of the lodge and stand it up in the snow to weep itself into exhaustion! There are no gentle words to convey the tender solicitudes of courtship, no terms of ordinary politeness: only in the Loucheux tongue can thanks be expressed. The exposure to which they are subjected in their wanderings, and the withering of the famines and gluttony of the feasts, combine to break down health and shorten life. And the greatest blessing they enjoy probably is that they die comparatively young, and go, wherever it may be, to a place which they make sure cannot be more barren of comfort or pleasure.

ANCIENT KNIFE WITH BEAVER-TOOTH BLADE

## IX

### DOGS AND SLEDGES

THE dogs share equally the good-luck or misfortune of their masters. The Indian is more regardful of his dogs than of his women, for dogs are less numerous than squaws, and more necessary to his support. The driver lashes them mercilessly with his whip and beats them brutally with clubs, but he never fails to include their rations in his sledge-load, nor to divide his last fish for their benefit. It is not goodness of heart that stirs his consideration, but fear for his own safety and the loss of an indispensable draught animal. Without his dogs he would be compelled to pack on his back what he now packs in the sledge, to drag his game out of the woods, and carry his furs to the post, while the loss of dogs *en route* might mean for him delay, starvation—possibly death.

In the great civilized world the dog has been called man's best friend; in this limitless stretch of snow and desolation and need he may be declared man's only friend; in the *grand pays* he has earned the trust without the test; here in this lone land he is being continuously tried, and never found wanting. He has no pedigree, and he may be of any color, but his usual appearance is that of a fairly long-headed, sharp-nosed mongrel, well tucked up behind, with big feet, and a coat of hair equal to that of a cub. To call these dogs "huskies" is an error common to nearly every one who has had anything to say on the subject.

The word "husky" is Northland slang for Eskimo, and is generally applied to that arctic denizen himself, as well as to everything belonging to him. Their dogs (hitched abreast instead of in single file) are properly called huskies, and thus it has come about that all dogs used to drag a sledge are ignorantly so called. The genuine husky is a distinct species, larger, more powerful, and faster, and is not easily to be had, since the Eskimos, like the Indians, are somewhat indifferent to their breeding, and good dogs are highly prized. Moreover, there is no communication between the Eskimos and the more southern Indians, so that a genuine husky is a *rara avis* below the arctic coast.

The Indians say their dogs are descended from the wolf, and certainly appearances do not belie them. Names are more plentiful than dogs, and the most commonly heard are Castor, Cabry, Soldat, Cæsar, Cabrel, Coffee, Milord, the popular ones being those of two syllables, with an R that may be rolled out to the whip's accompaniment. Nearly every post has a Bull and a Whiskey—only the name of that civilized stimulant can be found in all this land, though occasional hilarity is developed by some poor stuff made from sugar, and called beer. Whiskey was invariably the most forlorn-looking dog in the pack, while the laziest brutes I encountered were Bulls.

One would suppose that in a country literally dependent on dogs for winter transportation, quantity and at least some degree of quality would be kept up. And yet such is not the case. Not only is quality wanting, but the quantity is limited. The Hudson Bay Company, strangely enough, seems to have made no effort to improve or even establish a breed, and at their more important posts rarely maintain more than one train, and never more than two. Throughout the length of my trip I saw just seven trains of dogs that could be called first class—

Spencer's at McMurray; two belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company at Chipewyan; McKinley's, the Hudson's Bay Company officer at Fort Smith; Gaudet's, the company's officer at Resolution; the Roman Catholic mission's train at the same post; and that of Beniah, the Indian leader with whom I went into the Barren Grounds. Spencer and McKinley probably have the best two trains in the country, which they have bred from separate bitches that had some Newfoundland blood in them, and were the only dogs I saw that would come to harness on call.

Beyond the "foregoer," upon whom the meanings of *ma-a-r-r-che* (start), *e-u-u* (right), *ja* (left), and *whoa* are impressed by a club, and the steer-dog—as the one at, say, the wheel, to make it comprehensible, is called—there is no training. The foregoer follows the trail and sets the pace. The steer-dog keeps the sledge upon a slanting track, and guides it through trees and rocks. He must be strong, and is the most important of the four in rough country. As for competent drivers, they are even scarcer than good dogs, but the few are exceedingly skilful; and of these, Spencer, McKinley, Gaudet, François and his brother William at Chipewyan, Michael, the interpreter at Resolution, and the Catholic "brother," whose name I never knew, at Resolution, are easily the best. The difference between a good and a bad driver is that the former knows how and when to handle his sledge to ease the dogs, keeps them all up to their work, and does not "force" (urge) them at improper times. The bad driver spends his energy in throwing clubs at the foregoer and lashing the steer-dog, chiefly because the latter is within easy reach. He permits the sledge to slide hither and thither, to the exceeding wear and tear of the steer-dog. Now and then he stops the train and lashes the dogs all round, and at all times he is forcing

THE CARIOLE. DR. MACKAY'S HOUSE AND OFFICE IN BACKGROUND
Photographed by the author

them. Only trains made up of exceptional dogs last more than a couple of seasons, and once their usefulness is passed the poor brutes are turned loose to seek a living where those for whom food is provided are more frequently hungry than satisfied. Their vagrancy is usually short-lived—death by starvation or freezing comes speedily to their relief.

HAND-WARMERS OF THE NORTH

The farther north, the better the dogs and more gaudy their harness and trappings. They are always savage and suspicious and noisy, but to the south, towards La Biche, they are miserable in body as well, and are hitched to the sledge with harness purely Indian, and utterly devoid of adornment. Curiously enough, the Indian, who likes to decorate his own person, as a rule utterly ignores that of his dog, though he may paint the moose-skin which covers the head of his sledge, or hang tufts of hair or yarn upon it, as he does sometimes on the toes of his snow-shoes. All harness is made of moose-skin, but at Chipewyan and north it is better fashioned, and there are, besides, loin-cloths, called *tapis*, covered with bell and embroidery, and vivid pompons stuck into the collars, and floating ribbons of many contrasting colors. Add to this a driver in beaded moccasins, leggings, and mittens, with a *L'Assump-*

*tion* sash about his waist, a caribou-skin capote on his back, and a fancifully ornamented and betasselled "Tommy Atkins" cap on his head, and the Northland express is complete and at its best. Indeed, there is no combination more sprightly than a dog brigade, with its brilliant and many-hued *tapis*, its nodding pompons and streaming ribbons, and its picturesquely costumed driver. There is no sensation more exhilarating than running with the dogs on snow-shoes and a good track, to the jingling of the bells; when storm obscures the pompons, and wind drowns the jingle, and there is nothing in the sledge to eat, the sensation is not so enlivening.

These dogs are certainly notable travellers, from the best fed down to the puniest of the Indian species, which are contemptuously called *giddés* by the half-breeds, and are not a great deal larger than a big fox. They draw a heavier load, at a faster pace, on less food, and for a greater length of time than one would believe without seeing. The usual number to a train is four, and tandem is the mode of hitching them to the sledge, which is about seven feet long by fourteen inches wide, and made of either two or three birch slats held together by cross-bars, and turned over at the head like a toboggan. These four dogs will haul four hundred pounds on a fair track from twenty-five to thirty-five miles a day. In the woods where the snow is deep and the trail must be broken the day's trip will be fifteen to twenty miles. On a good lake or river track, drawing a *cariole* (a passenger sledge), they will go forty to fifty miles a day, and keep it up several days, and this on two white-fish weighing about three pounds apiece, and given to each dog at night. I saw Gaudet's train bring into Resolution five hundred pounds of caribou meat, which remained after supplying two men and four dogs during a four-day trip on Great Slave Lake.

Some great stories are told of the loads drawn by the Mackenzie River dogs, whose tails are docked short, to give a more workman-like appearance, and keep the meek and lowly from advertising their shrinking nature and spoiling the appearance of the train by sticking the offending appendage between their legs. It is said that eight or nine hundred and even a thousand pounds are commonly hauled in the Mackenzie district by four dogs. But I am inclined to class these stories with those I heard concerning the wonderful strength of the old-time packers. When I was going in on snow-shoes marvellous tales were related for my benefit of men who had carried five and six hundred pounds, and of one particular giant who had loaded himself with seven hundred pounds, and had written his name on the wall with three hundred pounds' weight tied to his wrist! When I was coming out on the Hudson's Bay Company flatboat I discovered no Indian or half-breed who packed more than two hundred pounds on his back, while the name-writing Hercules had left no successor.

## X

### FROM CHIPEWYAN TO FORT SMITH

IT must not be supposed that my researches at Chipewyan taught me all this, or that all I have said applies to the country immediately about that post. But while I am figuratively resting my ankle under Dr. Mackay's roof I have told something of the people and the country into which I am pushing. I rested only one day at Chipewyan, and with the exception of a most interesting visit to the Roman Catholic mission, in charge of Bishop Grouard (who is pursuing the only practical course of Indian civilization by beginning with the children), I spent my time getting my feet and ankle in condition for the onward journey, and in talking with the Doctor, who is one of the real and prominent "old-timers." Two others are J. S. Camsell, the Hudson's Bay Company officer at Fort Simpson, on the Mackenzie, one of the most popular factors and hardiest *voyageurs* in the country, and C. P. Gaudet, in charge of Fort Good Hope, on the same river.

Of Chipewyan itself there is little to say, other than that it was from this point, then a post of the Northwest Company, that Sir Alexander Mackenzie in 1789 took his departure for his voyage of discovery; and here, too, Sir John Franklin spent some time previous to embarking on the trip which resulted in the starvation of several of his party, and eventually in his own death.

I was given the same assurances here that I had re-

THE "RABBIT CAMP"

ceived all along my trip, of not being able to get into the Barren Grounds and out again in winter, but Dr. Mackay was good enough to yield to my determination to make the attempt, and to aid me by advice, and, what was more to the point, to place two of the post's best trains of dogs at my disposal. One of these was for the luggage, and the other to carry me a day on my journey, and then turn back, in order that my ankle, still very sensitive, should have another twelve hours' rest. We left Chipewyan on January 24th, in greater style than I affected at any subsequent time, with Maurice, one of the celebrated Beaulieu family, running before the dogs, and Roderick Fleet and William Pini, English and French half-breeds respectively, doing the driving. I cannot declare my first experience in a cariole to have been one of unalloyed pleasure. It saved my ankle, and for that I was of course grateful; but despite all the furs it is miserably cold travelling; and, what is equally as trying, the cariole keeps upsetting, unless you are on a well-worn lake or river track, and you, bundled up in furs, are dragged along face downwards, like a bag of meal, until the driver sets you up again. William was very attentive, but not all his care made me regret when the first day was over and my riding at an end.

We camped that night at the junction of the Peace and Slave rivers, and when we started the next morning, long before daylight, the temperature was 35° below zero, and our route lay down the Slave River. I noted very little difference between the scenery of this and that of Athabasca River—unless possibly the banks of the latter are somewhat higher and more heavily wooded. In fact, there is slight change in the scene anywhere in the country, except that caused by the gradual diminution of timber as you go north, until it dwarfs into the "land of little sticks," above Great Slave Lake, and disappears altogether

at the Barren Grounds. It is a country where the water-courses are the highways — for canoes in summer and snow-shoes in winter. The land is without roads, and stray where you will you may stand on unexplored soil. The river-banks are well timbered, but back of them stretches away, far beyond the Indians' ken, the trackless, uninhabitable muskeg.

My joy at being out of the cariole was brief, for the pain of my ankle was intensified by the hard track on which we were running, and the ice was full of cracks and holes, which in darkness are always dangerous to the *voyageur*, and were especially so to me in my crippled condition. We had the coldest weather I experienced before reaching the Barrens, the mercury touching 50° below the second night, and beginning at 42° and going to 48° on the third day. The only relief I had to the monotony of travel was afforded me by Roderick and Maurice in setting fox-traps, and my own experiment with a pair of Norwegian snow-shoes (skis), which I had made at Chipewyan, and that I found inferior to the web shoe for travel in this kind of country.

Although we were, indeed, going along at a pretty lively gait, and quite fast enough for my physical condition, my mental half chafed at the pace, and was impatient to reach Fort Smith. My eyes had been on this post ever since I left the railroad. It seemed the Mecca of my trip, for there lived James McKinley, the only man who could give me any information of the Barren Grounds, as he not only had been stationed at Great Slave Lake, but made a summer trip to that land of desolation with Warburton Pike. But the way was hard and the long stretches of river disheartening. It is an interesting fact that I always found I travelled easier where the river was tortuous, for, though knowing the distance to be none the less, the

many bends gave heart to reach the point beyond, while when I came upon a long stretch the bare work of running stared me in the face, and the distance seemed doubled. We really made very good time, and arrived at Fort Smith on the morning of the 27th, having been three days and two hours doing the 118 miles.

Though prepared for a cordial reception at the post, since McKinley's big heart and helping hand are known from end to end of the Northland, the heartiness of my welcome and the solicitude for my condition quite overpowered me. To one coming from the pulsing city, where it is "every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," it is a somewhat curious sensation to have strangers that know you but in the passing take such interest in your movements and exhibit concern for your comfort.

I was soon sitting in McKinley's unpretentious cabin, with the water he had brought soothing my swollen feet, and the tea his wife had brewed warming me. When I was refreshed, McKinley made me lie down, and then we talked of my proposed hunt for musk-oxen. He reiterated the assurances I had received ever since starting that I could not get into the Barrens in midwinter and get out again. He doubted whether I could induce Indians to make the attempt for love or money, but as I was bent on the effort, advised me to try to secure Beniah, a Dog-Rib leader, and one of the best hunters and most courageous Indians in the country. He said none of the Indians would be at Slave Lake at this time, and that the only sure way of getting into communication with them was by sending a runner to Resolution with a

CHIPEWYAN TRIPPING-SHOE, 3 feet long

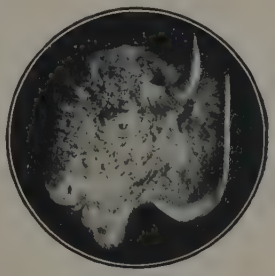
letter to Gaudet, the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge, asking him to send after Beniah, who would very likely be hunting in the woods six or eight days' journey from Slave Lake. Meanwhile he was organizing a wood-bison hunt with Henry Toke Munn, an Englishman, who had been in the country a year, and made a summer and an autumn trip into the Barrens, with the hard luck of bringing out only a musk-cow head, after a most trying experience, and they would be glad to have me join them.

This accorded with my plans nicely, for I had intended making a bison-hunt, and it could now be accomplished without loss of time—an important consideration—while Beniah was being found and brought to Resolution. Consequently an "express" was despatched to Resolution, and pending the return of Munn, who was in the woods trapping, and would be back the following day, I rested while "Mc" told me of the country and its people and its life, which he has learned so well in his twenty years' residence.

## XI

### OUR WOOD-BISON HUNT

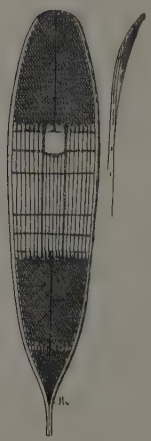
THE wood-bison is the once familiar species of our own Western plains, grown heavier in his retirement from the old life, when the trail of his hunter never grew cold, and he rested neither by day nor night. He is the same animal with a more rounded stern, acquired by his life of comparative restfulness, and a heavier, darker robe to protect him from the colder climate of his adopted home. How long he has been in this country there are no means of knowing. The present generation of Indians, and their fathers before them, have always hunted him in a desultory way, but there are no traditions of an earlier bison, and the country in which he roams tells no tales. There are no well-beaten trails, such as those which on the plains last even to the present day, to remind us of the vast herds that have been sacrificed to man's greed.



WOOD-BISON HEAD BROUGHT OUT BY THE AUTHOR

The muskeg where he ranges in the Northland shows no trail, and if it did it would remain undiscovered, for it is impassable to the hunter in summer, and in winter is covered by snow to the depth of two feet. Really little

is known of the wood-bison, except that he is gradually going the way of the plains species, from the difficulties of maintaining an existence where climate, pasturage, and man are all against him. Recently a law has been passed by the Canadian government prohibiting their killing, but it will be impossible to enforce it, since no mundane power could stop a starving Indian from shooting if he got the opportunity. A check can be put to sending out the hide, but that would not prevent killing for the meat. Moreover, my inquiry did not discover any wholesale slaughter of these animals.



LOUCHEUX SHOE, 6 feet long

Some thirty years ago a sudden and exceptional thaw in midwinter, followed by a severe storm and bitter cold, that covered the snow with ice which the bison could not break, caused the death of a very great many from starvation and freezing. Again, three years ago (1892), another thaw and storm gave the Indians an opportunity for that diabolical diversion of crusting, by which method some men reared in the civilized world hunt deer and moose to this day, and about fifty bison were then run down and killed. But these were unusual occasions. Bison are not being killed in large numbers nor shot frequently as individuals. They range over a country too large and too difficult to reach, and require more skilful hunting than the average Indian is capable of. When I was in the country in the winter of 1894–5 not even a bison track had been seen up to the time of our hunt, and the head I obtained through the kindness of Dr. Mackay was the last one shot, and that two years before. So the extermination of wood-bison through their hunting by

Indians is not to be apprehended, while the remoteness of their country, the difficulties of access—to say nothing of the dangers of starvation and freezing once you get there—protect them from the white hunter.

How many wood-bison there are is not easily estimated. I made diligent inquiry from all sources of information, and their numbers as told off to me ranged from 150 to 300. Joseph Beaulieu, at Smith Landing, popularly called "Susie" by the natives that cannot master the English pronunciation, and another of the famous Beaulieu family, said he believed there must be a thousand; but then "Susie" has the common failing of the country, and, moreover, he delivered himself of this statement when he was persuading us to take a hunter of his recommendation, and whom we afterwards cursed with all the depth and breadth and warmth of English expletive.

The bison range in the country bounded by Peace, Slave, and Buffalo rivers, which has an area of a good many hundred miles. As they roam this territory from end to end, and are usually found in small herds, the one of fifty that was killed a few years ago being an exceptional congregation, and as the Indians never hunt more than a very small piece of this section in one winter, the difficulty of arriving at a close estimate of their total number may be understood.

Personally I am convinced that 150 comes very near representing their total. Munn and I in our hunt very thoroughly covered the larger portion of their more southerly range, and discovered the tracks of thirteen; Munn in a subsequent hunt in a more northerly part of their range saw the tracks of forty; neither of us heard of any signs between these two sections, or Peace River way; and I, while at Slave Lake preparing for my musk-ox hunt, set inquiry afoot for signs of them in the most northerly

piece of their range, without getting enough encouragement to warrant delaying my start for the Barren Grounds for another attempt to bring out a bison head of my own killing. So that we two were the first to practically cover, one way and another, their entire range in one winter, and yet we heard of only fifty-three!

To plan a hunt was one thing, but to get started quite another. Half a dozen Indians told us by the hour how much they knew of the bison country and how undoubted their prowess, but whose knowledge, on close questioning, we found little more than our own. So we spent two days separating fact from fiction before finally deciding Calomé and Bushy to be the only two of the lot worth considering. But Calomé wanted a rifle for himself and a sack of flour for his wife before he would even discuss wages, and Bushy was uncertain of the section which we had decided to hunt. Meanwhile "Susie" sent word that he had secured a good hunter, Jeremi, who knew the country well, and was certain to find bison. So we decided on Jeremi for our guide, and Smith Landing, eighteen miles south of the post, as our starting-point.

It was half after three on the afternoon of February 1st when McKinley, Munn, and I got under way for the Landing, with two trains of dogs carrying our sleeping-robes, twenty pounds of bacon, fifty pounds of flour, three pounds of tea, and six pounds of tobacco, to last five of us for the eight days we expected would complete the hunt, and it was half after six when we had gone the eighteen miles that brought us to "Susie's" cabin. We limited our own supplies to the last degree, because we knew the going would be heavy and the fish for the dogs more than a load, and we counted on the snares we had taken to replenish our stock from the rabbits that swarm the woods.

Hunting in this country is a very different affair from

CUTTING A WAY THROUGH THE SMALL FIRS

hunting in any other. It is impossible to take a supply of good provisions, or even a good supply of the poor provision the land affords. We were particularly luxurious in having bacon and flour, for usually dried fish and dried caribou meat are all that may be had. It is out of the question to be well fed or comfortable; fish for the dogs must be carried, distances are great, travelling fatiguing, and hunting hard. Then there is the extreme difficulty of getting good hunters—the Indians are great braggarts but poor hunters—and the annoyance of making terms with them. They invariably want everything in sight while negotiating, and subsequently discover either a starving wife, whom you feed, or moccasinless feet, which you cover. But "Susie" assured us in Cree, Chipewyan, French, and in the limited English at his command, of which he is very proud, if uncertain, that we should have no trouble of any sort with Jeremi, or Joseph, his aide-de-camp. And therefore we accepted Jeremi in confidence, because "Susie" is an important personage among his people, who trade with and always refer to him as a *bourgeois*, which, curiously enough, in this country is a complimentary title indicating superiority.

Jeremi was one of the most unique tatterdemalions I beheld on my trip. Munn and I instantly dubbed him the Ancient Warrior; not that his appearance was forbidding, or that he ever revealed any predilection for the war-path, except perhaps when Joseph helped himself too generously to the grease in the frying-pan, but he looked as though he might have just come off a "march through Georgia," and there was a weariness about every motion that suggested long and arduous campaigning. He was tall and gaunt, with an appetite for tea and grease I never saw equalled, and a costume which baffled description. Two thick locks of hair hung forward of his ears and down

to his chin, a turban whose original color had long since been lost to view encircled his head, and crowning all was a very small cap he had got from some trader many years before, and which sat rakishly on one side or the other of his head, and consistently fell off every time he departed from the perpendicular. His preparations for sleeping always afforded me a great deal of quiet amusement. He would squat Indian fashion (and Indian fashion differs from tailor fashion only in that the feet are crossed behind and are sat on) before the fire, warming his back and stomach alternately; then he would heap up a pile of frozen rabbits for a pillow, roll up in his robe, and lie down to snore.

Very high pillows, by-the-way, are common to all these Indians; they gather everything loose about camp and stow it under their heads, until they are raised a couple of feet. It was always a wonder to me how they slept at all, though I found in the Barren Grounds, where there is no brush to soften your bed, and you lie on rock chiefly, and always on your side, that a moderately high pillow is desirable, as it relieves the shoulder from bearing the entire weight of your body.

It was rather late in the afternoon of February 2d when we left the Landing on a southwest course, which took us to and up Salt River, and finally to a treeless twelve-mile stretch, on the edge of which we made a wretched camp in the increasing cold and with insufficient firewood. There "Susie," who had also decided to make a try for bison, joined us that night. This made us, all told, a company of seven, which was not to Munn's liking, and certainly not to mine, for, of all things, I have ever shunned none so studiously as a large hunting-party. However, there was no way of mending matters. The wind grew stronger, and the mercury fell to 40° degrees below, which not only froze the noses, ears, and chins of all of us the

next morning crossing the open country, but, what was more serious, put such a crust on the snow that hunting an animal so wary as the bison was next to impossible. For two days we journeyed towards the section Jeremi "knew so well," going through a fine game country of swamps covered with coarse grass, and surrounded by willows, small patches of pine, spruce, and poplar, and plenty of moose signs everywhere. In fact, this is one of the best game districts in the North. On the morning of the third day, being at the edge of the bison country, Munn, "Susie," Jeremi, and I went on ahead looking for signs, "Mc" preferring to remain with the outfit to bring up trains, and pitch camp where we might indicate, as we did seven miles farther on. In a very cold wind we tramped for about twenty-five miles — stopping once to build a fire, that the Ancient Warrior might warm his feet, and again to eat a frozen biscuit we had each fetched—across small lakes, over marshes cut up by creeks, and along thickly wooded ridges, but the sight of not a solitary bison track rewarded our search.

WAR-BONNET

"Susie" and Jeremi were both much disappointed, for they had confidently expected to find signs in this particular section; so the next morning, our provisions having run low, McKinley, "Susie," and his Indian turned back for the Landing, while Munn and I set Jeremi and Joseph to making snares, determined to lay in supplies here before going deeper into the bison country. Then, too, we knew two sons of Jeremi's would be passing on their way to a cache of dried moose meat. So we bettered our camp to protect us from the wind, and while our two Indians caught rabbits, Munn and I chopped firewood, and smoked, and drank tea.

What truly astounding quantities of tea and tobacco one consumes, and what a craving for grease one acquires in this uncongenial clime! I found the strong black plug traded to the Indians a decided stimulant in the Barren Grounds, where a pipe and a cup of tea constituted one's bill of fare for several days at a time, and tea to be much more bracing than coffee. Coffee is the alleged luxury of the Northland, and only to be had at an occasional Hudson's Bay Company officer's table; but grease, in point of fact, is the real luxury. Only eternal vigilance will save your cache, and nothing less persuasive than a shot-gun rescue it from the hands of its Indian discoverer.

We stayed in this camp two days, and in that time snared rabbits enough to last us and the dogs a week, and to fill me with revulsion at the very sight of one.

There is something peculiarly offensive in rabbit-after continuous diet. I have lived at one time or another during my hunting experiences on one kind of game for periods of varying length, but nothing ever filled me with such loathing as rabbit. Indeed, it is commonly said by the Indians that they "starve on rabbit," and after my experience I can easily understand it; you may eat until

you are surfeited, but after a couple of hours' hard travelling you feel as empty as though in the midst of a prolonged fast. There is neither nourishment nor strength in the meat, and yet the rabbit seems almost to be manna for the otherwise God-forsaken land. In countless numbers they skurry over the entire country, and are just the ordinary rabbit known everywhere, except that here they change to white in the winter, and on the lower Barren Grounds double in size, and become arctic hares. Every seventh year their numbers are decreased a good half by

RABBIT SNARE

a mysterious and deadly disease, and then the Indians suffer, for no one can say how many depend on them for subsistence. If there is caribou or moose meat or fish at the lodge, it goes to the hunters, who must face the storms and withstand the hardships of travel; but the "squaw men," the old men, and certainly the women and children, more than once during the year owe their very lives to the rabbit. So, although despised by me, he is revered in this home of snow and hunger.

Caribou, I may say in passing, I consider of all wild meats the one that one tires of least.

We moved only fifteen miles the first day we broke our

rabbit camp, keeping a sharp lookout all the way, and passing over a country filled with curious bowl-shaped depressions that ranged from ten to fifty feet in depth and proportionately wide, and at night the Ancient Warrior's sons turned up to gladden our hearts and relieve our stomachs with dried moose meat. Dried meat, by-the-way, caribou or moose, when at its best, is about as thick as sole-leather, and of like consistency; when it is poor it somewhat resembles parchment in thickness and succulence. It is made by cutting the fresh meat into strips, which are hung over the fire to smoke, subsequently in the sun to dry, and is the ordinary food on these expeditions, because dried it is so much easier carried. It is not toothsome, but it is filling, and that is the main desideratum in this country. Fresh meat is the hunter's luxury.

The coming of these two boys furnished my first insight into the relations between Indian parents and children. They arrived, one with a badly frozen cheek, the other with frozen fingers, and both shivering with cold, yet Jeremi scarcely turned his head in greeting, made no sign to give them room by his own warm place at the fireside, nor showed paternal solicitude for their sufferings. They scraped away a little snow at the edge of our camp, and there rolled up in their blankets, while their dogs and ours, by the light of a glorious moon, mingled in an animated fight that lasted a good part of the night, and was waged vigorously around and over us. The dog is the one member of the Indian family that is no respecter of age or sex. But the boys pay the penalty of youth, as their sisters and mothers do of womanhood.

We were now where the sight of bison was an hourly expectation; we had come over one hundred miles into their range without a glimpse of a track, new or old, and

"JEREMI WAS TOO QUICK WITH HIS GUN"

Munn and I decided our quarry to be, as indeed he is, the rarest of the rare. We travelled all day along and up and down ridges, where men and dogs could scarcely drag the sledge for fallen timber and sharp ascents, and where the snow was deep, and breaking trail excessively hard, especially with tripping-shoes on which you sank to the knee, and with the toe of which you barked your shins as you raised your foot after every step to shake off the shovelful of accumulated snow.

In this fashion we worked our way for about twenty miles, and yet saw no signs. But we did have a fine camp in the woods that night, with a roaring, warming fire, and such a glorious auroral exhibition as I had never before beheld, nor ever afterwards saw surpassed. Now there were dancing waves of changing red and violet expanding and narrowing and whirling across the sky in phantom dances; then great radiant streaks of golden-greenish pierced the heavens like iridescent search-lights of incomparable power and brilliancy. It was all so startlingly brilliant and wonderfully beautiful. And I lay on my back, with the Indians on one side and the dogs all around, and stared at the magnificent spectacle, and—forgot the rabbits.

The Indians have no definite idea touching the aurora; in their always apt nomenclature they call it the "lights that move quickly," and in general accept the exhibition as merely the sign of wind or fine weather. The Dog-Ribs say it is the spirits of their ancestors holding a dance; another tribe varies this only by substituting fighting for dancing; but there is really no attempt at solution. They are too thoroughly occupied in solving the problem of living. They do claim, however, that the aurora is at times audible, and some scientists agree with them. Personally I can add little certainty to the uncer-

tain information on the question. Twice on my trip, when there were auroral displays, I heard noises somewhat like the rustling or crackling of a silken banner standing out in the wind, but whether it was made by settling or cracking snow and ice or by the aurora I cannot affirm. There is little opportunity to test the matter in winter, for, what with storms and winds, an absolutely still night is as rare as a day in June.

The next, our ninth out from the Landing, was the memorable day of the hunt. It opened in hope—for we were in the heart of the bison country—and closed in despair, because in one short hour we had seen and chased and lost our game.

We broke camp at daylight, to reach on this day the lake near which we expected to find bison, and the country we penetrated had not before been hunted by the Indians. It was broken into numberless little gullies and ridges, none of which Jeremi missed in his wandering, and the snow was so deep, and dead timber and thickly grown small fir so formidable, we made haste very slowly. What with clearing a way for the sledge, disentangling the dogs, and keeping on our feet, we advanced but twelve miles all day. We were in an unexplored country, and the Ancient Warrior was lost; he invariably carried us to the top of the highest ridge that lay anywhere within striking distance of our course, and, once there, sent Joseph up a tree for a view of some familiar landmark, while he sank on his knees in what had the appearance of a supplication for light on the darkness of our way, but was in reality his habitual attitude when filling his pipe. From one of these ridges we saw Caribou Mountain near by, really not more pretentious than a foot-hill, but which in this flat country bears the distinction of notable altitude.

So we travelled on, wearied by the very hard walking,

and wondering if indeed there were any bison in the land. At one o'clock we crossed a lake, but not the one we were seeking, where we saw fresh moose and caribou tracks, which we could not of course afford to follow, at the risk of scaring the big game we were after, much as we should have liked fresh meat. Just after crossing the lake the Ancient Warrior bore to the right of a sharp little ridge, and Munn and I gave the dogs a spell of a few moments, while we lighted our pipes, and joked about the old man having overlooked the ridge, and concluded he must have gone snow-blind. But even as we talked he turned to the left and began slowly plodding up the ridge; whereupon we agreed he was about to send Joseph aloft again, and was seeking high ground. Perhaps he, in fact, was—I never asked him—but Munn and I had hardly reached the foot of the ridge when Jeremi came hurrying back as excited as a phlegmatic Indian ever gets, and we suggested he had seen the "enemy," which these superstitious creatures are ever encountering, to their utter demoralization.

But the Ancient Warrior had the joke on us this time, for he fairly whispered, "Buffalo." Instantly Munn and I were tingling. At last the game we had tramped so far to get was at hand; heart-breaking trails, leaden snow-shoes, and rabbits were forgotten as the hunter's blood swept through our veins at the mention of bison. We four gathered closely in a little circle, and then in subdued tones Jeremi told Joseph, in Chipewyan, and Joseph, a few words at a time, translated to us in Northland French, that the ridge was literally covered with tracks, that they were fairly fresh, that we would leave the dogs where they were under cover, and take up the bison trail at once.

I do not become stirred easily, but when we got on top of the ridge and the tracks were before me, my heart quick-

ened, and there seemed no obstacles I could not surmount to reach my quarry. There were the tracks, sure enough, in broad paths like those made by cattle, quite fresh—probably yesterday's. We moved slowly along the ridge, Joseph, Jeremi, Munn, and I, in Indian file, scanning the willow-surrounded swamps on either side, each stepping in the other's shoe-prints, but making quite a bit of noise, nevertheless, for the snow was hard, and the shoe crunched and cracked it with alarming effect on the nerves of the stalking hunter. Fortunately a strong wind blew in our faces. In half a mile the tracks multiplied, and were very fresh—made that day—so we took off our snow-shoes and in one another's footsteps continued on as noiselessly as possible.

And now the ridge, hitherto thickly covered with poplar and pine, became a bare backbone which stretched away about 125 yards between swamps, and ended in a sharp rise thickly grown with small spruce.

We had not advanced ten yards farther when we discovered, simultaneously, I fancy, for we all crouched and drew our rifles out of their coats together, a shaggy head about 115 yards in front of us. A second and careful look told me it was a bison cow about two years old, with forehead sprinkled with either gray or white hair on a background of light brown. She was standing under the spruce and just over the rise of the ridge, so I could see only her forehead, eyes, and horns, which were about six inches long, and straight out from her head with slight curve at tips; I could not see her muzzle. The wind was in our favor, and she had not scented us, though from her vantage on the knoll she had heard and evidently seen us before we sighted her.

Munn and I had not before hunted bison, but our hunting experience was sufficient to make action under such

conditions intuitive. We knew there must be a herd over the ridge. We wanted a bull, and had no idea of firing on a heifer. We expected Jeremi would work around to the side and under the ridge, and up to where we could view and get a shot at the herd; or retreat and camp several miles away, to make another approach next morning. The heifer might scamper back to the cow, but that would not put the herd to flight, and meanwhile we should make our way along the ridge, perfectly certain the herd would not run until they scented or saw us, or we made undue disturbance. It was a splendid chance for a skilful stalk, just the situation a hunter loves most dearly. I did not consider the possibility of the Indians shooting, for they had agreed at the Landing not to fire until Munn and I had done so, and "Susie" said they would keep their word, and I trusted them. I know more of these Indians now than I did then.

ONE OF THE OLD FLINT-LOCKS

All this of course ran through my head in the few seconds I was taking my look at the heifer, and Jeremi's stealing off to the right and a little ahead rather corroborated my mental sizing of the situation. Suddenly, however, up went the guns of Jeremi and Joseph. There was no time for remonstrance, and Munn and I, in sheer desperation that luck might direct the bullets, threw up our guns also; those of the Indians exploded before we had ours fairly at shoulder, but we pulled trigger, chiefly because of that instinct which makes one's muscles at times work in sympathy with one's wishes.

I was so stunned by the sudden turn of affairs, and so exasperated at the Indians, that I was sorely tempted to empty the magazine of my rifle into them. I knew I could not possibly have scored; I felt sure Munn had not, but hoped against hope that he might have got his gun up for a sight. I did not think the Indians had, for they can hardly hit a barn door a hundred yards off. If I thought at all of their scoring, it was that we might have meat, which we needed, but even that, I am sure, did not enter into consideration.

The one miserable thought that we had lost what had been a good chance of getting a bison head was uppermost, for this herd would run for days, and entirely beyond our reach. Simultaneously with the shooting, the heifer disappeared, and we ran to the top of the knoll in hopes of a shot at the flying herd, but not a hoof was in sight, so rapid had been their flight, although the ridge opened to view three hundred yards away.

We discovered a few small drops of blood where the heifer had stood, counted the beds of eleven cows, and noted the snow beaten down into paths leading towards the end of ridge and muskeg to the right; and then began a mad race along the faint trail of blood, in hopes that the heifer might have been more badly wounded than the blood showed, and turned aside (as is their custom when hard hit) from the fleeing herd. But we had only a hard run in the deep snow as recompense.

And then we returned to our sledge and sat down in silence, and with the bitter realization that the bison-hunt was at an end. We did not say much, Munn and I; words could not do our feelings justice. There is hunters' luck, and only the sportsman who has sought big game, and experienced its operations for and against him, can sound the depths of our disappointment. To have got

near bison at all was remarkable, but to have succeeded after a long, hard hunt in actually seeing them, only to have our chance for a kill spoiled by the stupidity or viciousness of our Indians was too keen a grief to be soothed by mutual condolence or cursing Jeremi.

We went on another day, and saw old tracks of the same herd, but none others, and then we turned our faces Fort-Smithwards, making a circle to get back to our trail where we had camped about the second night. For three days we travelled by the compass, for we were lost, cutting our way through forests of small fir, grown so closely as to render progress almost impossible to a man, much less a train of worn-out dogs. The going was very hard, and hunger, our provisions being gone, less easy to bear now following upon our disappointment. On the fourth day we came out on our trail, and that night Munn and I reached McKinley's cabin, after covering forty-eight miles between 7 A.M. and 8 P.M. Before we slept, we poured our tale of woe into "Mc.'s" sympathetic ears, and then we all decided the only chances of success in a bison-hunt to be—time enough to cover their entire range from north to south, and, once on their tracks, binding the Indians hand and foot.

## XII

### FROM FORT SMITH TO GREAT SLAVE LAKE

BEFORE we left the Landing for our bison-hunt, Munn and I had decided to make another attempt under Bushy's guidance in case we failed under Jeremi's. But by the time we were back at Fort Smith fifteen days had been consumed instead of the promised six, and my "express" had returned from Fort Resolution. The letter he brought me was not exactly cheering after our depressing hunt. Gaudet wrote that the Indians fear entering the Barrens at this (winter) season of the year—that they take their lives in hand at all seasons, but especially now, with the danger of freezing added to that of starving; that he doubted gaining their consent to accompany me; . . . however, he had sent Beniah word to come to the post at once.

As I was already overdue at Resolution, a second bison-hunt, which I should have liked, was out of the question, and so Munn went alone with Bushy, after much difficulty in completing arrangements—for a keg of sugar-beer was on tap at Fort Smith. As the beer disappeared, the number of bison multiplied, until, by the time the keg was drained, Bushy had proclaimed acquaintance with the age and disposition of every bison in the country, and assured Munn of heads for himself and friends, and McKinley of meat enough to last through the winter. I am sorry to add that neither promise was fulfilled.

What kind of a time Munn had, and, incidentally, what hunting means in this country, may be learned from his letter, which I received at Slave Lake, on my return from the Barren Grounds:

"FORT SMITH, *March* 4th, 1895.

"DEAR WHITNEY,—I am in a position to state *positively* that not only are the days now long, but the nights are longer.

"Briefly, the fourth day out on the buffalo-hunt we got a couple of moose, and, of course, had to camp there the fifth day, owing to overeating of fresh meat. The next day we travelled, the next looked for tracks of our quarry, and found a sign twelve hours old of a band of about forty, and I congratulated myself on abstaining from shooting at a moose that I got within 150 yards of, as we thought the buffalo were close. We started at 6.30 the following day, made a camp for the dogs, and travelled down the track with hardly a spell till 6 P.M. We then camped on the tracks with nothing to eat and no axe or blanket, and next morning I and one of the men went on, the other weakening and returning to camp; five hours' hard travelling put us no nearer, and the man being sure they were heading for a country two days off, I very reluctantly gave up the chase and returned. Of course we couldn't make camp that night, though we made a bold push for it, and had to lay out for the second time with no blanket, nothing to eat, and wet to the skin. When it began to blow cold towards midnight and snow hard, I assure you it was by no means amusing; my meal in forty-eight hours consisted of a half-raw partridge, and for drink we melted snow into our gun covers—I *have* dined more luxuriously. What started the buffalo travelling thus, God in his wisdom only knows, but they were, no doubt, heading for some objective point, as they journeyed through the densest "cypré" with absolute directness, and the foregoer of the herd must have been a veritable Moses leading his followers to a promised land of—I suppose—muskeg grass.

"You will thus see that my statement in the commencement of this letter is a fact, and both the days and nights (on an empty stomach) are long, and we travelled far.

"I am glad to hear of deer on the islands, as you may avoid some of the misery of starvation on your musk-ox hunt. I leave here

on the 6th for civilization. Ye gods! think of the luxury of a big hot bath, a good cigar, and—but why should I fill your mind with envy and all uncharitableness? Truly, when I think of all you have left behind for the barrenness of the Barren Grounds, I agree with Puck: 'What fools these mortals be.' Hoping you may get back speedily and with a whole hide.

"Yours sincerely, HENRY TOKE MUNN."

Munn as undoubtedly deserved the heads, as Fort Smith stood in need of meat. Fort Smith is always wanting meat or fish or anything edible. It is the most inadequately provided post in the country, and has the smallest natural supply, for there are few fish in the river, and, as a rule, the Indians prefer "starving" on rabbits the women snare to going back into the country a hundred miles or so, where moose and woodland caribou are fairly plentiful. Only "Mc's" success in getting a moose kept us all from half rations after the bison-hunt, and when I passed through on my way back to civilization I found his children crying of hunger. Munn's hard luck, too, will convey some idea of the uncertainty of result and extent of endeavor incidental to hunting. One year he spent in the Northland, making two trips to the Barrens for musk-ox, two after bison, and his skill and experience and untold hardships were rewarded by but a single musk-cow. Pike gave two years of his life to the country, made three trips to the Barrens before he secured the musk-oxen he desired, and had one unsuccessful bison-hunt.

WOMAN'S SHOE, Canadian Snow-Shoe Club, 3 feet long

Two days after our return to Fort Smith, Munn went out with Bushy, and on the next day I started for Great Slave Lake.

The distance from Fort Smith to Resolution is 194 miles

down the Great Slave River, but portages reduce the possible route to 165 to 170 miles, which, as my ankle had nearly mended, and my half-breed guides and dogs were good travellers, I expected to do in four days. But the contingencies of snow-shoe travel are many. We had hardly got under way before such cramps seized the calves of my legs that I could scarcely move. I supposed it merely muscular stiffness caused by my two days' inaction at Smith after the hard day's run which terminated the bison-hunt, and that it would wear off, so I set grimly to work to catch the dog-train, which was going along at a lively rate and disappearing down the river.

No effort of mine, however, could quicken my gait beyond a shuffling, painful hobble, and I did not overtake the outfit until a stop was made for dinner fifteen miles farther on. I thought a rest and a little rubbing would relieve me, but when we started on again the cramps spread to both thighs, and I simply could not move. But for the pain I might have thought my legs paralyzed. I signalled Mercrede, my guide, and when I had dragged myself up to the dogs, climbed on to the sledge, and told him to go ahead, thinking the spasm would pass off, and meanwhile we should not lose time by stopping. There was short respite in this direction, however, for the dogs could not haul me in the heavy going without "forcing," and as they must be saved at all hazards, I determined on another effort at walking, and failing, to camp and doctor my muscles. This I made Mercrede understand after much difficulty, and then he went on and I tried to follow. I was in no better condition for travelling than before; a few steps and then a tumble, followed by a spell of crawling; another attempt at walking, and another tumble, until finally I directed my entire energy to crawling

on hands and knees, and thus I reached at last the camp Mercrede had made several miles below.

Vigorous and continuous application of mustang liniment put me in shape for travel the next morning. Exceedingly painful travel, but travel none the less, which was, after all, the main consideration. Walking was bearable, but running set every leg nerve and muscle vibrating, and I tried all possible ways of making those half-breeds know I wished them to walk. But they did not or would not understand, and there was nothing left for me but—to "stay" with them, which I did.

It was afterwards explained to me at Resolution why they had maintained such a pace despite my evident suffering. It seems I had made in the country some renown as a runner—a case of honor being thrust upon me, for I cannot see that I merited it, unless the Indians deemed perseverance worthy of such distinction. However, I gained the reputation nevertheless, and it travelled ahead of me from post to post. Now as the Indians and half-breeds are exceedingly jealous of their own reputation as runners, and probably did not fancy a white man even unwillingly sharing it, the result was that every pair of guides I secured set out to thoroughly test my qualifications for the name which had been given me. As I got fresh guides and dogs at each Hudson Bay post on my journey, it may be implied I was kept busy. Mercrede and his companion were the first two that had found me *hors de combat*, so to say, and they proceeded to have a good time with me. Well, they had it. At first I brought to my aid all the signs and Indian words, Cree and Chipewyan, I knew, in a serious and laborious effort to make them understand how painful it was for me to run. And they looked wise and solemn, and nodded assent — and then started out and went as hard as ever.

GREETINGS EN ROUTE

After one or two of these attempts at fruitless persuasion I developed a large and righteous anger, which was somewhat relieved by a cursing that exhausted a vocabulary of wide and highly colored range, and which the Indians did not understand—more's the pity, for I am sure the brilliant and contrasting effects would have appealed to their picturesque nature—and thereafter they had not the satisfaction of hearing a whimper nor of running away from me.

Later one of them came near ending my misery once and for all time by felling a tree, which crashed into the snow not six inches from where I was stooping tying my moccasin.

On the morning of the fourth day we came to the cabin of Carr and Duncan, the only two white trappers in the country. It was a joy to hear English again, and a comfort to get in-doors before a fire; and when I left they had braced me up mentally and physically by their hearty welcome and the heaping plates of lynx meat they set in front of me, and which is very tender and savory, and tastes a little like veal. It was just as well I did eat plenteously here, for one of my stupid Indians, when repacking the sledge, left out our small sack of provisions, and that night when the discovery was made and for the remainder of the trip we shared some wretched dried fish with the dogs.

The last half of the journey was exceedingly trying, because the storms violently disputed our progress, and the dogs were fagged by the depth of snow-fall. It was on one of these last hard days that, as I opened my notebook in the morning to write of the day before, I was reminded of a little dinner given me just on the eve of my departure from New York, at which five of my warmest friends had sat, and pledged my health and success, and

promised to drink to it again on Washington's birthday. And as I wrote February 22d in my journal that morning, that delightful evening seemed so long ago; but with the storm howling about me I drank their healths in strongest tea, and felt sure they too had drunk mine.

It was one o'clock of the fifth day when we came to the end of the (about) twenty-mile portage which connects Great Slave River with Great Slave Lake, and carries the *voyageur* over the last stage of his journey from Fort Smith to Resolution. The wind had subsided and the atmosphere cleared of flying snow as we toiled through the heavy going to the timber's edge, flanked on either side by closely growing and winter-bemantled pine; and when we finally reached the open, and the great frozen lake lay before us, the dogs were stopped for a spell, while the Indians got out their best mittens, relaced their moccasins, and lighted pipes.

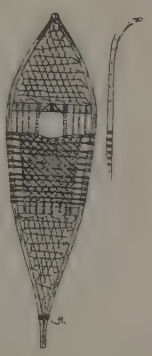
These preparations were always an infallible and, for most of the time, the only sign on the journey from La Biche to Resolution by which I knew we were approaching our destination. On the two occasions when speech with my guides was possible the only information I could ever elicit in reply to my inquiries concerning distance was that it was either a little or a big "piece" off. As a "little piece" meant anywhere from five miles to a day or a day and a half's travel, and a "big piece" from a day and a half to three or four or even more days, I was never able, until I learned to interpret the signs of changing costume, to form any idea of our relative location.

When arriving at or departing from a post the Indians invariably clothe themselves in their most highly ornamented moccasins, mittens, and leggings, and whip the dogs into their fastest pace. *En route*, however, these gay

"SPELLING" THE DOGS

trappings are exchanged for more sombre ones. On the morning of the trip's last day the decorated leggings are again put on, but the best moccasins are not brought forth unless the post is to be reached before noon, and the mittens not before the journey is within a few hours of its end—sometimes not until the last pipe, which is filled and lighted during a day's running about once every hour and a half—as was the case when we halted for our first look at Great Slave Lake, whose glistening surface stretched away to the west far beyond the range of sight.

It is always customary, too, to stop for a pipe when they come within sight of the journey's end—no matter if it is only a couple of miles away and everybody and the dogs are faint with hunger and worn with fatigue. They are true to the philosophy that deems anticipation better than realization. And so we stood and looked at Resolution and its little line of cabins straggling along the lake's northern shore six miles away, while Mercrede arrayed himself in elaborately beaded moccasins, and I warmed with thankfulness too deep for words that the final stage of my 900 miles was completed, and the outfitting post for the Barren Grounds in view at last.



SEAUTEAUX SHOE, Saskatchewan, 4 feet long

When we arrived at the fort, an hour and a quarter later, Gaudet welcomed me with characteristic Northland heartiness, and there was a commotion among the natives; for the coming of the "white hunter" had been heralded, and they were curious to see what manner of man was this who had penetrated the stupendous North at its most forbidding season.

But I was too happy in the accomplishment of my trip to recite details, and too worn to give heed to the whisperings and jostlings of the men, women, and children that gathered about and followed me to the door of Gaudet's cabin.

## XIII

### MAKING READY FOR THE BARREN GROUNDS

THE boiling of the teakettle always follows swiftly upon the arrival of a *voyageur* in this desolate but hospitable land, and it was not many minutes before Gaudet's sister, who proved a ministering angel during my stay at Resolution, had poured a cup of tea and placed before me some caribou ribs, the first fresh meat I had seen since leaving La Biche. Nowhere in my experience have I witnessed more disinterested hospitality than in this great lone land. From north to south—from Hudson's Bay Company officer to the poorest Indian hunter, among the half-breeds at the post or the Indians in the woods, in the log cabins or in the caribou-skin tepees—the entrance of a guest is invariably the signal for stirring up the fire and putting on the teakettle; or, if there is no tea, which is more frequently the case with the Indians, of putting a piece of meat on to boil; or, if there is none, of offering dried meat or fish, or the best of whatever there may be.

The successful hunter pays ample tribute to his skill. While the meat lasts his lodge is never cleared of the less fortunate, and the squaw is never done cooking, and feeding the half-starved that squat about the fire in ever-changing but never diminishing circles. I marvelled at this lavish hospitality while living with the Indians, for it was never at any time a giving out of plenty, and always meant subsequent want for the entertainers. I have seen

every bit of meat put into the kettle and handed around, until the last scrap was eaten, and the host and myself go hungry for two days afterwards. When we were making our way towards the Barren Grounds I saw an Indian of our party, who I knew had not eaten meat for two days, bring forth a bone saved from the dog feed, handle it almost fondly before the fire, and then divide it among one or two of his fellows.

It is so the world over. Those that have least to give, give of their little the more spontaneously. We need not go to this barren land for example; we may see it on the streets of our great cities. I have often noted the penny dropped into the outstretched importuning hand of the miserably clad begger by a passing figure scarcely better clothed than the supplicant for alms. And its explanation is not difficult: that mite comes from one who has known—perhaps knows—the distress of hunger and the misery of cold.

With the Indians this applies more particularly to relations among themselves; towards the white man their generosity is not so disinterested; they will give of their best, but expect threefold in return, and so long as you have tea and tobacco you are entire master of the situation; for there is nothing you cannot obtain with one or the other of these North Country luxuries, and, moreover, there is no peace for you so long as either remains.

If one is inexperienced in roughing life, or lacks decision, and, let us say, heartlessness to say "no," this country is no place for him, for more persistent and skilled beggars are probably not to be found anywhere. I was annoyed a great deal at first for the reason that Pike had been improvident of his provisions, and I suppose it spread abroad in the land that white men were easy to "work." So when I

FORT RESOLUTION, GREAT SLAVE LAKE
From a Photograph by the author

came along they had new lessons to learn before we "understood one another." Personally I acknowledge I prefer the Indians to the half-breeds. Of course I met splendid exceptions, notably Gaudet and Spencer, Hudson's Bay Company officers, and three of the company's servants — Michael Manderville, the interpreter at Resolution, and François and William Pini, at Chipewyan, of whom I have already spoken: but, as a rule, the half-breeds are less tolerable than the Indians. And that is saying a great deal. It is a question of two evils. One would repent of either choice. Both in general are untrustworthy, avaricious, and uncleanly, but the half-breed is nearer the white man in the viciousness of his hypocrisy. The white blood in his veins comes from the lowest strains, and has given him the cunning of a higher intelligence without imparting the better attributes of the more civilized prototype.

It is much easier for civilized man to become savage than for a savage to become civilized.

How I slept that first night of my arrival at Resolution! The comfort of a full stomach, the satisfaction of being at the scene of action, so to speak, were soothing beyond expression. At any time, no matter how long hence, I am sure if ever I sit back in my chair and reflect upon the period of utmost complacency in my past life, those two weeks at Resolution will be immediately recalled. My bed was the board floor; the substance of my daily fare, caribou meat, tea, and bread; my daily occupation, running from ten to fifteen miles to keep in condition; the atmosphere, arctic; not a bird note to break the silence of the woods, nor a bit of pretty scenery to relieve the monotony of the great desert of snow—but I was no longer jaded in body and mind, there was no hunger, I was in magnificent physical condition, and just at the door

of the desolate waste which was to open for a successful venture or close upon me forever.

It was well I had not delayed my departure from Fort Smith, nor gone with Munn for the second try at bison, for Gaudet told me that my non-appearance so long after the appointed day had convinced him I had yielded to persuasion, and given up my intention of making an attempt to get into the Barren Grounds until the later and usual time. He said that the runner he had sent after Beniah could not find him; that Beniah was somewhere in the woods hunting, and the heavy snow-falls had made following his tracks impossible; but the runner had seen some Indians who were likely to meet Beniah and tell him he was wanted at the fort. This was all satisfactory enough so far as it went, but it left me in doubt as to when I might expect to get off for musk-ox. The second day after my arrival, however, an Indian came in with a note from Beniah, written in the hieroglyphics which the priests of the Oblates Fathers invented when first they began their missionary work in this country.

Beniah said, first of all, he heard I was a "great chief" (these Indians are cute diplomats); that no one had ever ventured into the Barren Grounds at that season; but he would come into the post to talk the matter over seriously so soon as he shot enough meat to make the trip of six days possible, which meant that we should see him in from eight to ten days.

Next day Mercrede and his dogs started back for Fort Smith, carrying the only letter I was able to send out during my six months' absence, and which Munn, who intended making his way to Edmonton on his return from the bison-hunt with Bushy, had promised me to carry.

And so I settled to active preparation to be in readiness on the arrival of Beniah, who I was determined to induce

"SOUR GRAPES"

to make the trip. There were dogs and an interpreter and a driver to engage, moccasins and duffel and mittens and strouds to make, and a heavy caribou-fur capote and winter-caribou robe for sleeping to secure. Nobody appeared to enter upon the task with much zest, and every one shook his head and warned me against the trip. All agreed that it was an impossible undertaking, and Gaudet used his utmost persuasion to induce me to delay my departure until the usual time of the musk-ox hunt.

The Indians time their hunting trips to the Barren Grounds (they never go there except after musk-ox) with the movement of the caribou — *i. e.*, the early summer, about the last of April or first part of May, when the cows begin their migration from the woods to the Arctic Ocean, and in the early autumn, September and October.

Caribou are absolutely necessary to the penetration of the Barren Grounds, because of the impossibility of either obtaining a sufficient supply of provisions to last out the trip, or carrying them if such were to be had. This I find to be the most difficult thing for my hunting friends to comprehend. They have asked me if an adequate supply could not be carried in from the railroad to Resolution. Possibly so, but it would have to be done a year in advance, and then by the Hudson's Bay Company steamer and flatboats.

Assuming that such a supply had been laid in at Resolution, I cannot see, because of the scarcity of dog trains, that the hunter would be much better off than before, unless of course time was no object, and he was prepared to make one preliminary journey into the Barrens to cache the provisions at different points *en route*, and willing to remain in the country a year or two. Pike made one hunt in the best and easiest way by making a previous trip into the Barrens solely for the purpose of killing and caching

caribou, which lessened the chances of starvation on his next attempt, when, in addition to the cached meat, the opportunity of adding to the supply was offered by the moving bands of caribou. Yet he had a very hard time of it. Munn on his summer trip had the caribou and fish in the numberless lakes; on his autumn trip he attempted to better conditions by taking along a supply of pounded dried meat, which was speedily exhausted, and, caribou being scarce, he and his party and their dogs had a starving time of it indeed.

Midsummer is of course the season in which one may visit the Barrens with least danger, for at that time you travel by canoe, caribou are plentiful—if you are lucky enough to find them, for they are very uncertain in their movements—the thermometer rarely gets below freezing-point (though you are persecuted beyond endurance by mosquitoes), and the winds have lost much of their fury. But in summer-time the musk-ox fur is not prime, and of course musk-ox is the only excuse for visiting the God-forsaken place. And so trips are confined to the spring and autumn, when the trials are more severe, but the reward greater. The Indians go in parties of from four to six; never less than four, because they could not carry sufficient wood to enable them to get far enough into the Barrens for reasonable hope of getting musk-oxen; and rarely more than six, because by the time they have gone as far as six sledges of wood will permit, they have had all the freezing and starving they can stand, even though no musk-oxen have been forthcoming.

Many parties go into the Barrens and never see even a musk-ox track, and many more skirmish along the edge, fearful of a plunge into the interior, yet hoping for the sight of a stray ox. Wood must be carried, not for warmth nor necessarily to cook meat, but to boil tea; for

man could not endure the fatigue and cold and starvation without the stimulus of hot tea once or twice a day. When the sledges are loaded with the requisite supply of wood and the sleeping-robes there is no room left for provisions. To take more sledges would mean more men, more dogs, more mouths to feed, with no added prospect of feeding them. Thus it is that no attempt is made to carry in provisions, and that a visit to the home of the musk-ox is always attended by great danger, and never without much suffering, be the season what it may. None but the younger and hardiest and most experienced Indians go into the Barrens, and to be a musk-ox hunter is their highest conception of courage and skill and endurance.

Bearing in mind these conditions, it may be imagined with what disfavor my proposed visit in early March was viewed. No one would hire me dogs, asserting I should never get them back alive; and if Gaudet had not come to my rescue, and let me have his own train, I fear I should have been obliged to delay my hunt until the usual time. I shall never forget the kindness of Gaudet and his sister—he helped me in my search for an interpreter and dog-driver, and in my studies of the country and people; she saw that my moccasins and duffel were properly worked, and herself made me a pair of slippers of unborn musk-ox hide, to be worn next the skin, fur side in; and both of them heaped curios upon me in such generous profusion that I grew afraid of expressing admiration for anything, lest they give it to me forthwith. These seem little things, no doubt, to the inhabitant of the *grand pays*, but in that country the little things are everything, and Gaudet and his sister gave freely of their all, and seemed sorry they could not do more.

Meanwhile I was awaiting Beniah, taking photographs,

writing up my journal, keeping in condition, and rejoicing that I had found a country where whistling is an unknown vice, and "Comrades" has not yet desecrated melody.

I did not propose to have any more cramps in my legs if training would provide against them. I knew such a condition in the Barrens would put an end to all hope of musk-ox, or of my getting out to tell how I didn't shoot one. So nearly every afternoon I took a twelve to fifteen mile run on Great Slave Lake, and, what with the good meat I was eating three times daily and this exercise, I was so "fit" when I started for the Barrens that no Indians ran me off my legs, as I was told they would on the trip across the lake. On one of the afternoons I experienced how suddenly a lake storm gathers, and with what force it bursts upon the luckless traveller. Had I not fortunately put my compass in my pocket that very morning I should probably have been on that lake yet, for the snow whirled around me at such a pace and in such quantities as to darken the atmosphere, and the wind beat upon me with so great a force that, bent almost double, I could barely keep moving. I had great difficulty in reading the needle or following the direction it indicated; but when the prospect of a night on the lake seemed surest, the wind that was blowing off shore carried the evening tolling of the mission bell to me, and sweeter sound I never heard!

Fort Resolution is one of the most important posts in the country. Though it has not so many claims to distinction as Chipewyan, its natural resources for food are much greater; for near by is the most productive fishery in the country; the Dog-Rib and Yellow-Knife Indians generally keep it supplied with caribou meat in winter, and geese and ducks are fairly plentiful in spring. Fur-

thermore, it is the only post that secures any quantity of the country luxury—grease; though the Indians never bring in marrow, which is a very palatable tidbit. The grease they do bring in is the fat from along the back and around the joints of the caribou, which is called hard grease, in contradistinction to the marrow; that is soft. Both of these are used in making pemmican, that is made of dried meat pounded into shreds and mixed with grease, and rolled into balls or made into square or round slabs.

Pemmican, however, is a rare article nowadays, and not to be found anywhere south of Resolution, and only there on occasion. This is chiefly because caribou are not so plentiful as they were formerly and the Indians keep most of the grease for their own consumption. Nor do they make pemmican to any great extent, their substitute for it being the pounded meat, which is carried in little caribou-skin bags when travelling, and eaten with the grease—a pinch of pounded meat and a bite of grease. I must confess that a plate of pounded dried meat and several good-sized lumps of clear grease were about the most tempting morsels I had set before me at any time on my trip. Perhaps I should not care for either now, but on the especial occasions I was favored I believed an epicure who did not smack his lips in relish would be impossible to please. One never gets enough of grease in the Northland; it is eaten as some in the civilized world consume sugar; in fact, I developed a craving for sweets that even grease did not satisfy, chiefly, I expect, because the supply was so limited, and somewhat notable in my case for the reason that ordinarily I seldom if ever touch sweets. The absence of bread and vegetables, and the excessive cold, undoubtedly combine to excite the desire for both grease and sweets.

Resolution, next to Fort Simpson, is credited, I believe,

with sending out the greatest number of fur packs; but however that may be, it certainly is the scene in summer of the largest congregation of Indians when they come out of the woods, pitch their lodges on the lake shore, and settle down to trade their fur and worry Gaudet into giving them credit.

Trading with an Indian is no trivial matter. There is first to get him to put a value on his fur, and then to convince him that there is enough stock on hand to pay him. There is of course no money in this country, a "made beaver" skin being the standard of value by which all trade is conducted—as, for example, a marten is worth from two to three beaver-skins, a bear-pelt about twenty beaver-skins, and a beaver-skin itself from six to twelve "made beaver." On rough calculation the "made beaver" is equal to about fifty cents, though it fluctuates throughout the country.

When the Indian has finally agreed upon a price for his fur, he proceeds at once to the company "store," and then the intricate business of trading against his credit of "made beaver" skins begins. It is impossible to deal with more than one Indian at a time, and so they are taken into the "store" singly, and the door is bolted, and life immediately becomes a burden to the Hudson's Bay Company officer. If there is anything in the stock that has not been overhauled and priced before the Indian exhausts his credit, it is only because it is out of sight. But in a way he is a satisfactory sort of a customer. He is not exacting as to what he gets, so long as he gets something; he may really want beads or duffel, but if there is none of either he as readily takes a copper teakettle or a knife. It is quite unimportant that he may actually need neither.

He is particular on one point only, and that is, he never

leaves the store so long as he has a "made beaver" to spend, and when he has used up his due he always makes an eloquent and vigorous appeal for gratuity or debt. As a matter of fact, these Indians are most considerately and generously treated by the company; they are paid a good price for their fur, and the worthy, and many times the unworthy, are often given both debt and gratuity. There are no Indians I know of that are better treated, and few as well. Nor have I ever visited a country where trade competition operated less to the advantage of the natives. The few independent traders that have worked their way into this North country have done little, so far as I could see, beyond raising the value of certain kinds of fur above its fair marketable value, which in some lines has necessitated the introduction of an inferior quality of stuff for trade. So that the Indian has really been the loser.

Although several hundred Indians bring their fur to Resolution, and the "census" of the post is returned as about 300, as at Chipewyan the actual residence is far below that number—in fact, seven families, that comprise sixty souls. Great Slave Lake itself is one of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world, being 300 miles long, with an estimated area of from 11,200 to 15,000 square miles. Great Bear Lake is but a couple thousand square miles smaller, and the size of both may be judged by comparing them with Lake Michigan, which has 20,000 square miles. Fancy Lake Michigan a solid sheet of dazzling white, its shores broken by deep bays and sparsely covered with smallish pine, and everywhere silence and desolation and snow, and you have some idea of Great Slave Lake in winter.

## XIV

### BENIAH'S ARRIVAL

WITH the first Sunday in March came the anxiously awaited Beniah, in a cariole, as befitting a hunter of his reputation, and with an attendant, also riding, as became the servant of so powerful a leader. I may say in passing that Beniah has a very accurate conception of his importance, and never fails to impress it upon those with whom he comes in contact. He is really the best hunter in the country, and in Northland possessions—fur and dogs—reckons a deal more than any other individual. He is a "leader" in his tribe—Dog-Rib—in so far as being the head of a hunting-party, and of bringing in the largest number of skins to the company. There is no other kind of "leaders" in any of the tribes—no councils and no election to such prominence by vote or heredity. Leadership is a survival of the fittest, and he who gains the distinction earns it.

Beniah is much respected by his people, and is altogether a very superior Indian; short in stature, probably five feet five inches, but sturdy. He can talk longer without exhausting a subject than any man I ever knew. In our subsequent powwow there was no contingency he did not foresee, especially if it was to operate adversely to him, and no point of an agreement that was not thoroughly threshed out; in fact, he showed a logical mind that sometimes became lost in metaphors, but pretty

often had the right end of the solution. He is good-natured, except at such time as he considers his dignity affronted by those dependent on his bounty, and somewhat of a wag too, whose most mirth-provoking sally was a repeated and crescendo exclamation of "*cdo*" (Dog-Rib for hot) when it was bitterest cold. The greatest tribute I can pay Beniah is to say that he kept his word with me, and that is so rare a virtue among these Indians as to be praise enough. The only thing I treasure against him was his distressing rendition of a song which had few words and a tune that wailed for longer and shorter periods of time over three treble notes. I could never decide whether it was a song of joy or lamentation, as he set it going on all occasions before we reached the Barrens; and then he subsided, for there no opportunity of rejoicing offered, and no chant, be it never so dolorous, could have expressed the depth of our misery.

BENIAH
From a Photograph by the author

There was much mental measuring of one another, of drinking tea, and smoking on the day after Beniah's arrival at Resolution, but we did not come to the business of my venture until the evening. Then we all gathered in Gaudet's room and smoked some more, and talked for a long time about everything else, as is usual at these

powwows, except of the one thing in which we were both most interested.

Finally the interpreter told Beniah I wanted him to go with me to the Barren Grounds, and did not wish to wait until the usual time of hunting; and Beniah forthwith delivered himself of quite a speech, in which he said he was glad to welcome the first white man to his hunting country, especially one whom he heard was a "great chief"; recited the danger of the Barren Grounds; the impossibility of getting Indians to make the attempt at such a season, even if he were willing; explained the absence of firewood, the chances of freezing or starving to death, and, in fact, told off the difficulties to a length for which I have no space.

Now, I had sized up the situation long before Beniah arrived at the post, and I had purposely delayed this meeting until I had looked him over a bit in the day, during the smoking and tea-drinking. My knowledge of the Indian character in general, and of this one in particular, had decided me upon a course of diplomacy to induce him to go with me, and I knew if I secured him that he would insist upon his hunters going, if only that misery likes company. I was determined to get into the Barren Grounds, no matter what its terrors.

Therefore when I replied to Beniah—I treated all the dangers as a matter of course—I told him I had come to him because his skill and courage were household words in the great world; that my one ambition had been, if I reached the North, to hunt musk-oxen with Beniah; that I had been travelling from my lodge, which was far, far away, by the "big water," for many suns, and that now, being here, I was sure so insignificant a matter as hunger or cold would not deter him from accompanying me. I made Beniah feel that my belief in his courage was un-

bounded. I told him I knew the other "leaders" would of course shrink from exposure, but they were as "children" to him. I made him understand that I had no doubt of his willingness to go with me; that it was merely a question of beaver-skins between us, and I was prepared to pay him liberally. I placed him in such a position that by refusing to go with me he tacitly acknowledged that he was afraid, that he was no greater than the other leaders to whom I had referred as children when compared with him.

The result was that before the meeting closed it was midnight, but Beniah had promised me to go, provided he could make up his party, and we were to start next day for his lodge, which was in the woods about three days east of Fort Rae, and six days' travel north from Resolution.

The little post of Resolution was shaken to its foundation next day when it learned that we really intended starting, and there was a great shaking of heads, and many direful prophecies told for our benefit. But I felt sure Beniah would not turn tail, since he had given me his word; and as for myself, I had been having nothing but discouragement since first I set out.

At noon my sledge was dragged into the post, and packed with my outfit, which consisted of a winter caribou-skin robe, lined with a pair of 4-point H.B.C. blankets, and made into a bag (which I subsequently ripped open; the popular supposition that a bag is best is faulty; you can sleep much warmer in the unsewn robes, because you can roll them about you more snugly), one heavy caribou-skin capote, one cloth capote, one sweater, two pairs of mittens, one pair moose-skin gloves, one pair leggings, three silk handkerchiefs, eight pair moccasins, eight pair duffel socks, one copper kettle, one cup, my rifle and hunt-

ing-knife, compass, camera, thermometer, ten pounds of tea, twelve pounds of tobacco, ten pounds of flour, and ten balls of pemmican (provisions I intended to cache at the last wood, where, if we succeeded in getting back, I knew we should arrive in starving condition), two bottles of my old friend mustang liniment, a pint of brandy I had carried from Hamilton, and the antiseptic lozenges and bandages, and iodoform, in case it became necessary to play surgeon for one of the party or myself.

## XV

### TO THE TIMBER'S EDGE

WE were ready to start at three, and I was waiting for my dog-driver and interpreter when word came that he had backed out, and Gaudet renewed his efforts to dissuade me from the trip. But I had not come thus far to be daunted by so inconsiderable a thing as deprivation of speech or driving my own dogs, and I motioned Beniah to move on. And now there was a hand-shaking that seemed to have no ending, for every one pressed upon me closely, and grasped my hand solemnly and in silence. It was rather a funereal leave-taking.

There is a little portage of about a mile that leads out from Resolution to the west on to Great Slave Lake, and Gaudet ran along with me over this; and as he ran, told me the names of the dogs: Foro (the foregoer), Finnette, Flossie, and Blucher (the steer dog). And then we came to the lake, and halted for a last good-bye. Kind-hearted Gaudet seemed much depressed; and as for me—well, at any rate, I was started, and if fate ruled that I never come back, my place would be filled, and the world roll on as usual; so with a heart for any fate, I called out "*M-a-arche!*" to Foro, and the journey to the Barrens was begun in earnest.

I had no time for meditation, for my work was cut out from the start. Beniah and his Indian were riding in carioles, and swinging along at a clipping gait; and though

my load was light, and my dogs better than theirs, I did not ride, because I wished to save them as much as possible. So Beniah sped on ahead, and I followed on behind, going easily, for my training had made me very fit. And I had learned enough, too, to keep on my snow-shoes, though the lake would have permitted going without. Running on ice without snow-shoes has the same effect on leg muscles as an unyielding armory floor after a cinder-track.

After four hours we came that night to Stony Island, twenty-two miles from Resolution, where we camped, and whose only interest for me lay in the fact that here, seventy-five years before, Sir John Franklin had breakfasted on the trip which closed so disastrously for his party. We slept in a tiny cabin with thirteen others, men, women, and children, and I appreciated for the first time in what filth human beings will wallow.

Next morning several Indians joined us, and we put in a long, hard day on the lake, out of sight of the shore most of the time, I running, and all the Indians in carioles. About 4.30 we came to a point where the Indians hauling meat to Resolution had made a cache, and here we halted, and a fire was lighted. I shall never forget my attempts to learn how much farther on we were going that night. I can now see myself sitting on the rocks, setting up miniature lodges in the snow with little twigs, and using my few Dog-Rib words, *con* (fire), *ethar* (far), supplemented with numerous gestures, to ascertain if the lodge fire was to be far away. My efforts created much amusement, but drew no information, and I realized how very much alone I was indeed. Nor shall I forget my amazement and my relief at seeing another fire lighted not twenty yards from the first, where we had eaten, and camp made for the night.

If there is one thing these Indians know how to do it is to build a roaring fire where wood is plentiful; first of all, pine brush is cut down and laid about three feet high in a semicircle, on top of which the sledges are lifted to keep them from the voracious dogs. The opening of the semicircle is piled high with wood, and when lighted throws out warmth enough to keep you comfortable so long as it lasts, even with the mercury at its lowest.

About noon the next day we left the lake, striking north, and for three days, starting at six and going until eight and nine at night, we travelled across a rough country, broken up by ridges and filled with lakes—most of the ridges bare of all timber, and what trees there were, very insignificant. All this time I had been running and the Indians riding, and I was well pleased when on the night of the third day we reached Beniah's camp, which proved to be quite the biggest settlement I had seen, for these Indians roam about in small parties of one or two lodges. Only a few consequential leaders like Beniah have a fixed habitation, and then it is only used in summer, when the fishing is going forward.

Here, while Beniah was explaining my mission and making up his party, I put in three very uncomfortable days. To say that I was an object of curiosity would be putting it mildly; I was indeed a stranger in a strange land. The men examined over and again every article I possessed; the women stared me out of countenance; the mothers used me as a bugaboo to hush their crying babies; and the dogs crowded about me so threateningly that I never ventured outside the lodge without my whip. I was the first white man they had seen, and one and all made the most of their opportunity. I was on exhibition with a vengeance, only, unlike other freaks, I had no hours; the show opened when I arose in the morning,

and was still on when I rolled up in my blankets at night. And I, on my part, made most careful scrutiny of the curious surroundings in which I found myself. We were camped on top of a ridge covered with small pines, where Beniah had pitched his tepee to catch the caribou that were just beginning to work out to the edge of the woods. There were three lodges, all full, and, so long as I remained, the occupants of the other two spent the greater part of their time in Beniah's.

There were actually fifteen sleeping in our little lodge; who they all were, and what their relations, I never could thoroughly satisfy myself. I picked out Beniah's wife (far and away the best-looking squaw I saw in the country) from the way she served him; and another, wife of Wecindar. But the third woman in the lodge I could never place; she seemed every one's servant and nobody's wife in particular. I never could make out who provided for her; in fact, that same query puzzled me many times and of many Indians. There were always one or two who seemed never to have any teakettle or meat of their own, and lived entirely on the bounty of others. And how that bounty was given!—thrown at them as though they were dogs; for though the Indian is generous with his meat, he appears to hold in contempt those who do not at least occasionally have some of their very own.

Here in our lodge, for instance, three kettles of tea were boiled—mine, which Beniah shared; a second, that of Wecindar's; and a third shared by four or five men together. What was left of mine went to Beniah's wife and boy (for the women, as a rule, eat after the men), but what the others got I declare I never could see. Now and then I discovered them with a bone, but never regularly served at the usual time of eating.

Indeed, there is no usual time of eating with the Ind-

BENIAH'S LODGE IN THE WOODS
From a Photograph by the author

ians; so long as there is any meat they eat half a dozen times a day, and on the slightest provocation, such as the entrance of a visitor or the return of some one from a hunt. And I never beheld the equal of their capacity. I saw one lodge eat an entire caribou at a sitting—head, hoofs (with outside horn covering removed), entrails, stomach, heart, liver, lungs, parts of generation, marrow, everything but the hide and bones. The head is quite a delicacy, and is always reserved for the successful hunter. Caribou tongue is really rich, and many is the meal I made on the eyes and ears, which are very good—at least, they seemed so then.

I suppose really I am not fitted to pass an opinion on these Northland dainties, because at the time I ate them anything filling would have seemed delicious. Some of the intestines when boiled, the large one particularly, are fat and satisfying, but, even though starving, I detected a marked difference when they were eaten raw out of the caribou or musk-ox stomach. I could never tolerate, probably because I never had a chance at it when really hungry, one of their greatest delicacies—blood-pudding, I call it, for a better name. This was made by taking the stomach of the caribou, with its half-digested contents, cut up the liver into it, adding some fat, and then hanging the whole mess over the fire. By the way they fell upon it, it must be very toothsome. There was never a period of my starvation when I could attempt the womb of the caribou, which the Indians devoured raw, and without washing, and not until I had gone three days without putting anything into my stomach but tea could I eat the unborn calf. I have no doubt some of my readers will be disgusted by this recital; and as I sit here at my desk writing, with but to reach out and push a button for dinner, luncheon—what I will—I can hardly realize that only

a few months ago I choked an Indian until he gave up a piece of musk-ox intestine he had stolen from me. One must starve to know what one will eat.

In times of prosperity these Indian tepees are by no means unsightly. They are of caribou-skin stretched around and to within about three feet of the top of poles, which number according to the size of the lodge. The sides of the circle are banked up with snow and pine brush, and, inside, the smallest brush makes a clean-looking and pleasantly smelling floor. The open fire occupies the centre; and above it, stretched from side to side of the lodge, are poles upon which the meat is placed to thaw, and from which the kettles are suspended.

Around this fire the men and women sit, cross-legged, all day, jabbering incessantly in their guttural speech that is impossible to describe in writing, and at night they roll up in their blankets and stretch out with their feet at the very fire's edge. I used to wonder what on earth they found to talk about, for the clatter never came to a full stop, and when I lay down at times, trying in slumber to escape the din, it seemed as though it must all be a hideous dream. But any such illusion was speedily dispelled by the yelping of a dog that had worked its way into the lodge, and was being clubbed until it worked its way out again.

Domestic economics are a dead letter in the Indian household. There is no place for any particular thing, and nothing is ever in any particular place. The back part of the lodge, where it is too cold to sit even when the fire blazes highest, appears to be the general storeroom. Everything not in immediate use is thrown there in indiscriminate confusion. If the squaw has finished stripping a caribou leg of its meat, she tosses the bone over her shoulder into the unknown behind her; if she

has completed the lacing of a snow-shoe, it is served similarly; the Indian hurls his knife there when he is through with it, and the children do the same with the bones or intestines or bits of meat they may have filched from the feasting, in which they never share. And when there is a demand for any article such an overhauling ensues as would put to shame a May-day house-cleaning.

Children are not much in evidence in the Indian household. They rarely cry, for experience has taught them that such outward expression of grief or alarm or hurt meets with much personal discomfort. If they are in the moss-bag age, which usually ends at two, they are put into a sort of hammock within the lodge and rocked at a terrifying pace to the accompaniment of a crooning that would strike terror to the heart of any crying babe. If they are old enough to toddle, they are turned out-of-doors to tell their sorrows to the winds.

DOG-WHIP

The Indian has no patience for the little solicitudes of life, nor for its frivolities. His amusements are few and simple. Outside of a something that resembles that ancient pastime of "button, button—who has the button?" and where the penalty is a piece of tobacco, there are no games to speak of. The dancing is exceedingly awkward and crude—a shuffling about in a circle, varied by hopping up and down, and the music con-

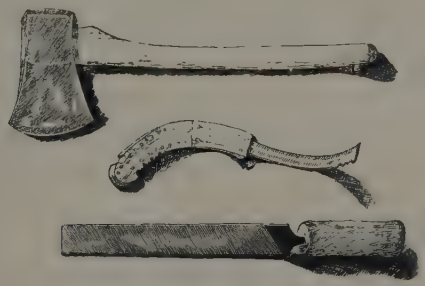
fined to the monotony of the single-headed drum, or mayhap an occasional fiddle picked up at the post, which in that case squeaks through a medley of reels. Their dearest recreation is sleeping, since most of their time is spent in procuring food, and the balance in resting from the toil required to obtain it.

The day after my arrival Beniah took up seriously the question of getting volunteers for the musk-ox hunt. At least I judged so from the gathering of the men in our lodge, the long and earnest conference, and the displeased looks that were every now and again cast my way. It must be remembered that I knew practically nothing of the language, and was dependent on signs. My Dog-Rib vocabulary consisted of *curre* (stop), *ecla oulee ?* (what is it called ?), *ethar* (far), *con* (fire), *ega* (hurry), *bet* (meat), *oole* (none), *illa* (no), *eh* (yes), *too* (water), *ethen* (caribou), *ejeri* (musk-ox), *edzar* (cold), and *sla* (plenty)—words that Gaudet told me at the last minute, when my interpreter backed out, and which I wrote down phonetically just as I was starting. I picked up a few others afterwards, but had really always to rely on signs, and I found the Indians not only dull of comprehension, although they ordinarily learn much quicker by the eye than by the ear, but disinclined to understand me. They seemed, with one or two exceptions, to wish to make it as difficult for me as possible.

Judging by appearances, Beniah was having a heated time of it persuading them to go into the Barrens, as I supposed he would have, and the storm that had blown up, and the cold, which my thermometer registered as 46° below, did not tend to increase their liking for the venture. But I was convinced that Beniah would bring it about, because these Indians could not afford to deny him, and he would not, could not, go without them.

It was a lugubrious day that, for no meat was in the lodge, a hunter had been found frozen dead at his traps, some one had died in the adjoining lodge, and there was mourning in the air.

My first intimation of the death was most dreadful feminine wailing, seconded by mournful howling of the dogs,



THE INDIAN'S TOOL-KIT—AXE, CROOKED KNIFE (HOME-MADE), AND FILE

which all together made such distressing bedlam as I hope never to hear again. The coffin was a rude slab box axe-hewn from the pine, bound together by babiche, and suspended from a single pole, by which it was borne as a litter on the shoulders of two Indians, one in front and one behind. Following were some half-dozen women, all chanting a most direful dirge; and as the little procession disappeared over the ridge the dogs sat on their haunches on top of the hill and whined a last requiem for the poor wretch, who would nevermore struggle for life in the white desert.

Next day I knew Beniah had succeeded in organizing a party, for the women began relacing snow-shoes and making mittens, and the men set to work shaving down pine poles into extra runners for the sledges. The Indian's tool-kit consists of an axe, a large file, and a "crooked

knife," which has a blade made from a file, a bone handle, and in general appearance looks somewhat like a farrier's knife. It is an implement of general utility, carried by all, and exceedingly deft in the hands of some. The original of the dog-whip handle illustrated, and really a very creditable piece of carving, was made with just such tools by William Flett, a Loucheux, and the interpreter at Fort Smith. When they go after musk-ox they add a huge weapon with a blade nine inches long and one-eighth of an inch thick (and the best-shaped point for skinning I ever used), which becomes at once hunting-knife and Barren Ground axe—for nothing larger for chopping is taken or required.

As the men toiled away at the pine slabs, shaving off about two inches for a length of seven feet with their crooked knives, and the women laced snow-shoes, I wondered if I had ever seen people do more work and accomplish less. If there is a roundabout way, these Indians seek it out; a straight line does not appeal to them in any form. They always begin at the wrong end, and choose the longest way. And as for pitching camp, a white man of any experience who could not do better would be well laughed at by his hunting companions. Between making up their mind as to the precise piece of ground on which to pitch it, and getting into one another's way while doing so, the length of time they take would make any man of roughing experience disgusted. How fervently I used to wish for a command of their language to give a few instructions, and, incidentally, my opinion of them individually and collectively!

And all the time they keep up an incessant jabber, or stop work entirely in the heat of discussion. Between chattering and, in the lodge, catching vermin, with which the women and children especially are literally alive, the

wonder is they ever accomplish anything. One hand is almost invariably kept busy seeking those Northland "birds of prey"; and as one is caught it is conveyed to the teeth and cracked and subsequently eaten. It may be imagined when the lodge is full that, what with the cracking (which is distinctly audible) and the hunting, the scene is enlivening. Keeping track of the alternately disappearing hands and determining the cause of the cracking were at first quite exciting occupation for me during my weary days in the lodge. And "they never touched me" during the entire trip, for which I thank an ointment I carried, and that I shall be glad to tell any sportsman likely to visit localities where vermin rule in undisputed sway.

How gratified I was when on the third day we finally left the women, some of the vermin, and the lodges, and started on our way to the Barren Grounds, I shall not attempt to say. It seemed to me that the starving and freezing that lay before were little less to be dreaded than the filth and monotony I was leaving behind. Not that I left all the filth or vermin behind, for my seven Indians took along a generous share, but, at any rate, I was out in the open, instead of being sandwiched between women and children that made me crawl only to look at them.

There was a very solemn leave-taking on the day we left Beniah's lodge, and I was as much in the dark as to the relationship between the men and women as on the first day of my arrival. Every man embraced and kissed every woman, the men shook hands, and the children sat down in the snow and stared, and as we moved off the dogs left behind sent up their wolfish chorus.

Ye gods! it was a relief to be started!

Beniah and I had held a sign-talk that morning, and I

made out that there was no meat in the lodge, which was no news, as we had eaten but tea and grease for two days; that in one "sleep"—*i.e.*, by to-morrow morning—we should be where there were caribou; stop there one sleep, and then go on for *ejeri;* meanwhile his *con* (fire)—*i.e.*, house—would be moved to the *toocho* (big water)—*i.e.*, Great Slave Lake—because here where we were it was *bet-oole* (no meat). I understood from this that his wife would go to the lakes, around which the Indians always settle when the caribou fail, and where she would await our return, subsisting on what fish could be caught under the ice or what rabbits might be snared in the woods.

The one "sleep" did not bring us up to the caribou, but it took us north to the lodge of another Indian who had been more fortunate than we. Here for one day we feasted and the Indians slept, and when we started on

CUTTING LODGE-POLES ON THE EDGE OF THE TIMBER
From a Photograph by the author

again the next morning Beniah signed me that we were now off for musk-ox. Another day of travel in a fearful wind and the mercury at 47° below, over rocky ridges and through pine that was growing smaller and more scattering as we advanced, and at night we camped on the shore of King Lake.

The next morning we lingered for a couple of hours while the Indians cut and trimmed lodge-poles we must carry with us. And as I climbed to the top of a rocky ridge, and viewed the desert of treeless snow extending far into the horizon before me, I knew we had come to the edge of timber, and that the Barren Grounds, in all their desolation, lay before me. And I thought, as I stood and gazed into the cheerless waste, that if death marked my venture it would not be a hard country to leave.

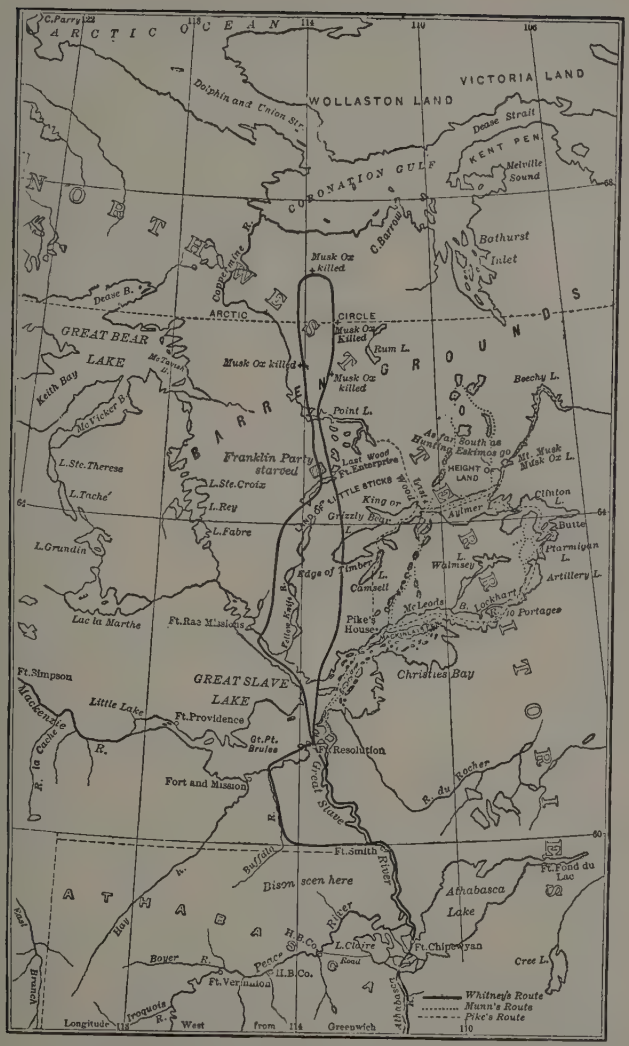
## XVI

### IN THE "LAND OF LITTLE STICKS"

We left all hopes of a warming fire on the south side of King Lake when we lashed the newly cut lodge-poles to our sledges and took up our northward way through the outlying relics of timber-land, which the Indians aptly call the "Land of Little Sticks." There is no abrupt ending of the timber-line. For a day or two before reaching King Lake the trees are growing smaller and more scarce; as you draw nearer they stretch away like irregular lines of skirmishers deployed along the frontier to intercept further encroachment on the Barren Grounds.

And now you pass beyond these sentries and travel along a ridge which makes out into the white desert—a long, wooded peninsula—or mayhap you cross a lake to find a wooded island on the other side. Gradually—imperceptibly almost—the peninsulas grow shorter and the islands smaller, until finally you stand on the shore of King Lake and look north into desolation.

Probably the roughest country in all the Northland is that going down to the Barrens. Nature appears to have made an effort to stay the footsteps of the wanderer while yet there is opportunity to turn from the trials that await him beyond. Isolated hills, sharp little ridges, and narrow, shallow valleys, running hither and thither, all rock-covered, and every now and again a lake, go to make up a




MAP SHOWING THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE THROUGH THE BARREN GROUNDS

(See Note on page 187)

rugged and confused whole. One can well imagine some Titan ploughman had cross-sectioned the land into huge ridge and furrow, stopping here and there to raise a mound, and sowing all with rocks of every shape and size which your fancy pictures into all kinds of animals. It looks forbidding, and it is a great deal more so than it appears.

'Twas over such going I had my first real experience in dog-driving, for up till now there had been only the usual handling of the sledge, and therein lie all the difficulties of the art. If you can imagine a canoe pitching in short, choppy waves, you will gain some idea of the action of a lightly loaded sledge being dragged over this ridge and furrow and rock. Without guidance the sledge would soon pound itself to pieces, so you humor and coax it through the furrows, ease it around or lift it over the rocks, pull with the dogs in climbing the ridge, and pull against them in going down. And all the time, because of your enforced running alongside the head of the sledge, in order to handle it by the "tail-line," you are tripping over rocks you cannot see, being jammed in between others you cannot escape, or blocking the progress of the sledge with an arm or a leg, or, often as not, with your head.

The Indians left me to work out my own salvation, and my dogs added difficulties to those nature had already liberally provided. The most exciting, and withal discomforting, moments I had were in going downhill. Whether in contempt for my inexperience, or misunderstanding my commands, whenever we began a descent and I called "W-h-o-a!" Foro, the foregoer, invariably broke into a run, starting up the other dogs, and dragging me after them, hanging to the tail-line, which I did not drop, because I thought it just as well the dogs should learn early in the game that they could not "shake" me. And so sometimes I went downhill head-first, at other times

feet-first; but the speed of the dogs never lessened until the bottom had been reached, except when I brought up against a rock, stopping them short, and nearly dislocating my arms thereby.

By-and-by I grew skilful enough to stay on my feet once in a while, and on such occasions a rush after the dogs at top speed would take me up to the foregoer about halfway down the hill, where I fell on him as though he were a football rolling back of the line from a blocked kick and I was after a touch-down. And then we were rather a mixed-up lot, I and the dogs and the sledge—until I had given Foro a few samples of my English pronunciation.

Poor old Foro! how miserable he made my life for a while! After I had dropped on him half a dozen times in the middle of a wild gallop downhill he began to understand my "W-h-o-a!" and then we got on better.

And what a lesson, too, in snow-shoeing was this dog-driving! It was reasonable, I suppose, for me to believe myself somewhat skilled on snow-shoes by the time I had reached Great Slave Lake. But when I started from Beniah's lodge I discovered there was much to learn. No man may consider himself an expert until he has driven dogs and handled a sledge over such country as that approaching the Land of Little Sticks—even the heart-breaking and shoe-tripping muskeg is not a circumstance to it.

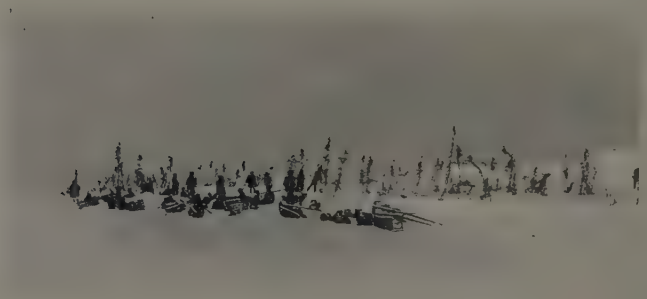
By referring to the map of the Barren Grounds on page 185, the reader will find the routes of those explorers who have penetrated into the Barren Grounds. Both Pike and Munn reached Great Slave Lake by Hudson's Bay Company steamer and by canoe from Athabasca Landing.

Frank Russel, the other white man who has succeeded in getting into the Barrens, started from Fort Rae, which he reached by Hudson's Bay Company steamer. Mr. Russel's route would be given were it known to me. As near as I could learn at Great Slave Lake, Mr. Russell took a course north of east from Fort Rae, which he held for from six to eight days before turning back.

Within the borders of the Land of Little Sticks the

general character of the country becomes more rolling. The rocks are always in evidence, but the furrows have broadened to valleys, and the ridges lost their sharpness and gained in height. Still, the little sharp ridges and furrows never disappear entirely. One day you may see them only here and there; on another probably every elevation will reveal them. To a larger or smaller extent they are scattered through all that part of the Barrens I travelled over, and are the most likely musk-ox grounds, because of the moss and lichens that cling to the rocks, and are the easier gathered. The "little sticks" are pine or juniper, from three to eight feet high, that in small patches are scattered — I do not know how many miles apart, but I can give an idea by saying that during the day of thirty-five to forty miles' travel on the course we pursued we came upon probably a couple of these clumps each day of the two and a half we spent crossing the Land of Little Sticks. Each night we camped where the bushes grew into smallish trees, and covered probably half an acre. But between these patches nothing inflammable showed above the snow—not even a twig.

As we worked our way due north, travelling by the sun



A PIPE IN THE LAND OF LITTLE STICKS
From a Photograph by the author

when it shone, as Indians always do, and by my compass when it stormed, as it mostly did, we climbed to the top of the highest elevations that lay in our course or near it, and while we smoked a pipe, viewed the forlorn panorama which, when the storm permitted, unrolled before us so repeatedly and monotonously. There it was, always the same, unchangeable and unchanged — glittering snow, ridge-encircled lakes, rocky mounds and basins, and far away in the distance a small black speck, perhaps a wood oasis in the desert of snow.

From the hour of leaving our lucky friend in the woods, two days before, we had eaten no meat. We had kept a sharp though unsuccessful lookout for caribou. Beniah had produced some grease from a little bag he carried, and another Indian had found a piece of frozen caribou intestine in the depths of his sledge, and these, with a few hitherto undiscovered bones, remains of dog-feed, stayed our eight stomachs for the first day's travel in the Land of Little Sticks. We had taken along no supply of dried meat or grease, because caribou signs at the edge of timber convinced the Indians that the cows had begun their migration to the North, and we should be able to kill enough for the dogs and ourselves. But all signs fail in the Barren Grounds. The caribou may have been moving, but they were not moving our way.

Throughout that second day scouts were sent to the east and west searching for caribou, and on top of every hill in our path we halted and hungrily scanned the uncompromising wilderness for a sight of meat.

The usual chatter of the Indians had ceased. In silence, and against a strong head-wind, we plodded all day long, and when in the gloaming we set up our lodge in one of the little patches of pine, there was nothing left us for the evening meal but tea and a pipe.

As we squatted around the fire awaiting the melting of the snow in the teakettle, the Indians appeared to be holding a consultation, and shortly one of them left the circle and went to my sledge. So soon as he began unlacing the wrapper I had a fairly clear idea of what he was after, and as quickly realized that I was in for a "scrap." I watched the Indian, however, without dissent, and all the other Indians watched me, until he had uncovered and begun opening the bag in which were the dozen balls of pemmican I had brought from Fort Resolution. And then I said, "*Illa*" (no). The Indian hesitated in his foraging, and looked first at me, probably to discover if I was serious, and then to the others—for encouragement, I suppose. Evidently he got it; at least, there was a chorus of gutturals, and he set to work at the bag again. And now I rose on my knees and called him by name—Seeyah—and when he paused and looked at me, I added, rather louder and more earnestly, "*Illa, illa.*" That would have been the end of the piratical episode, I think, had Seeyah been the captain of the crew; but while he stood undecided, with his hand in the bag, the others maintained an animated council of war, in whose utterances I seemed to recognize appeals of urgency to him and of defiance to me, and so Seeyah renewed the attack.

I perfectly realized the unpleasantness of my position, but I felt the situation bore most importantly on the relations between the Indians and me for the balance of the trip. It was a crisis I would have cheerfully averted, but being thrust upon me, I believed the success of my venture, to say nothing of my peace of mind, depended on how I survived it. It was not only that the Indians should at this period of their hunger consume those few balls of pemmican, but it was that their disregard of my commands might in the future lead to greater recklessness

in provisions; and recklessness of provisions was just as apt as not to end in our starvation, or, what concerned me more, failure of my trip. I had fetched the pemmican to have at a time and cache at a place when, as near as I could estimate, we should be in direst need. To eat it now, with the journey barely begun, was to rob us of our last resource. I felt if I could go without meat for two days and resist the temptation of eating, they, whose very existence is divided into alternate periods of feasting and fasting, could also, and must, if my determination was to carry weight.

I was not a little exasperated, too, that the Indians should treat my wishes with contempt, and so when Seeyah renewed his explorations for pemmican I confess I was in fit humor to leave no doubt in their minds as to whom the disposition of that pemmican actually belonged. Jumping to my feet, I grabbed the Indian by the shoulder and jerked him away from my sledge. Instantly all the Indians were on their feet, jabbering and gesticulating at a great rate; and while the storm of their displeasure raged, I backed up against my sledge and awaited its abatement, shouting "*Illa!*" every now and again, and keeping a sharp lookout for any sudden movement on their part. As in my mind's eye I now see those Indians grouped about the teakettle, all talking at once, and casting lowering looks at me, back against my sledge, shouting "*Illa!*" whenever I thought they could hear me above their own din, the situation seems mirth provoking. But the humor of it did not appeal to me so much at that time.

INDIAN LEGGING

Finally, when there came a lull in the vocal bombardment, I stepped forward and entered upon the most elaborate and important speech I had yet attempted in the sign language. I held their attention for probably fifteen minutes, and there was no interruption save when the dogs broke into the lodge and scrambled and fought all over us, until whipped out again. I expressed to them that I had brought the pemmican not for myself, but for us all; that we had only begun our journey; that there might come a time when it would save us from death; that I intended leaving it at the last wood; that they could not get it now without fighting for it, and if we fought I should surely be killed, as we were in quarters too confined to use any weapon but a knife, and they were seven against me, and then the "Big Master" (the Hudson's Bay Company commissioner, Mr. Chipman, who I hope will forgive my liking him to an implacable Nemesis in my hour of need) would take all their skins away, and kill them and their women and children. I do not believe at any time they really had an idea of serious personal conflict, but, at all events, I made them understand they could not get the pemmican that night without putting me out of the way, and they left off muttering, drank their tea in sullen silence, glaring at me over the top of their cups.

Before pipes had been lighted two of the scouts came in, each with a caribou head on his back and bearing the good news that three had been killed. So peace reigned again in the lodge, and the late unpleasantness was forgotten, while we feasted on the ears and eyes and tongues of those two heads.

But these two heads among eight men furnished, of course, only a mouthful apiece, and the real feast, and, I may add, our last, began the next morning, when we came

OUR LAST FEAST
From a Photograph by the author

to where the three carcasses of the caribou lay. It happened that there were a few scattering little sticks near by, and half of us gathered firewood, while the others guarded the caribou from the rapacious dogs. To hold the dogs in check is to turn the sledges upside-down and sit on them. But all the while the dogs jump and tug and howl, and now and again one slips his simple harness, and then nothing short of a blow that knocks him nearly senseless drives him from the caribou. It is cruel treatment, but the necessity is extreme. Sometimes, even with the sledge turned over, the starving, straining dogs get started towards the coveted prize, and then every man sets upon them with whipstock and lash, for once those four dogs got to the carcass, there would be no hope of rescuing any of the meat. Sometimes, frenzied by their unsuccessful efforts to get the meat, they turn on one another, and then ensues a dog-fight of such fury as can never be witnessed anywhere beyond the Barren Grounds, with its maddening conditions.

RACING SHOE, Canadian Snow-Shoe Club, 3 feet long

Even though by some transcendent means I should be given plenty to eat, not anything could induce me to again visit the Barrens and witness the sufferings of those poor dumb brutes. Only for one period (I think, though not absolutely certain, because I was too cold and miserable to write in my note-book every day, and must depend largely on memory) of three days on the trip did they go entirely without meat. At all others they had a little, just a mouthful, except twice, when we camped by a good killing of musk-ox, and then they fared sumptuously. But they were half famished practically all the time, and my conscience smote me sorely as I noted their glaring eyes

and tucked-up stomachs, and realized that my thirst for adventure was the cause of it all. We were fortunate enough to kill caribou and musk-oxen at intervals which enabled us to give the dogs just a bite sometimes every day, and at least every other day, with the exception of that three-day period.

When we killed caribou the dogs were fed on the spot, and the little meat remaining was divided among the sledges, to be carried for them against the days we were not so lucky. We never were lucky enough to kill before this little supply was exhausted. Had we been, we, the seven Indians and I, would have eaten meat. As it was, we ate the intestines and fat, and the dogs ate the meat, because there was not nourishment enough in the intestines for the dogs. Before we left Resolution, Beniah and I had a thorough understanding on this point. Many of the Indian expeditions to the Barrens are crippled by loss of dogs from starvation, and I knew the loss of our dogs meant failure; so we decided if there was any starving the greater part of it should fall on us, realizing of course that if the worst came we could eat the dogs. Beniah held to his agreement, and enforced compliance from the others, and to his wisdom in this direction, in fact, is due much of our success in getting out of the Barrens in such good condition.

When it is remembered that the ordinary meal for a dog-train—*i.e.*, four dogs, that are travelling thirty or more miles a day—consists of a caribou hind and fore-quarter, that we had twenty-eight dogs, and that we never got more than a caribou or two at intervals of several days, the reader may understand why the dogs were like wild animals, and why we ate the intestines and grease and saved them the meat.

When we killed musk-ox we first cut off meat for a day

FEEDING THE DOGS

or two's dog-feeding, and then turned the dogs loose on the carcasses, over which they worried and snarled and fought the livelong night. When there were no carcasses, they were fed out of hand from the slender supply on the sledge, and then they fought us, and worried the weaker among themselves into dividing the frozen chunks that were tossed to them.

This dog-feeding was a trying experience. All the trains were fed at the same time—when we camped at night—and such a scene cannot be duplicated anywhere on earth. As we emerged from the lodge with the tiny feed rolled up in the skirt of our capote, there was a rush by the dogs that pretty nearly carried us off our feet, and frequently knocked down the lodge. We always tried, but never with success, to steal a march on the dogs and get away from the lodge before the rush, but the moment one of us showed his head they gathered for the assault, and there was nothing to do but to scramble out as best we could, otherwise they would have poured into the lodge and torn it and our clothes to pieces in their crazy hunger. So we would bolt out in a body, heads down, and hugging the meat to our breasts with one hand, use the whip vigorously with the other, while the dogs jumped into us and on top of us in their frantic endeavors to tear away the little scrap of meat we held. Gradually we would separate, and each man attempt to gather his train by lashing those that did not belong to him, and calling by name those that did.

When, after much fighting, each had gathered his own, the actual process of feeding began, and this again demanded much activity and some strategy to insure every dog of your train getting its portion. I never had time to notice how the Indians did it, but my method was to run each dog in turn a few yards from the other three,

quickly toss his meat to him before the others caught up, and then stand guard over him while he ate it.

The eating did not occupy much time — there was only a growl, a grab, and a gulp, and the meat was gone.

It was necessary to be expeditious, for the dogs that had swallowed their meat ran from group to group seeking those that had not, and woe betide the poor beast that attempted to masticate his morsel! Two of my train, Flossie and Finnette, were very timid, and gave me no end of bother. It was only necessary for another dog to start towards them, and they would drop their meat and run off. I found it necessary to hold them by the scuff of the neck while they ate, and I laid my whip-stock over the heads of the dogs that fought around me.

Feeding animals in the Zoo isn't a circumstance to feeding dogs in the Barrens.

As I have said, our three-caribou feast of that morning —our third in the Land of Little Sticks—was the last. I like to dwell on it even now. First the legs of the caribou were cut off, stripped of their sinews and flesh, and the bones cracked open for the marrow; then the heart and kidneys and two unborn calves; then the tongues and the eyes and the ears; and all the while ribs were roasting, stuck upon sticks about the fire, and a kettle full of what was left from the dog-feed hung suspended from a tripod over all. I confined myself to the marrow and ribs, and simply marvelled at the quantity those Indians ate. When we started on again there was not left a great deal of the three caribou to load on to the sledges, but the Indians were in good-humor.

## XVII

### THE "LAST WOOD"

ABOUT noon of that day, from the top of a ridge, we saw, far in the distance, a black patch, so much larger than those we had passed it seemed almost as though we had got turned about and were travelling towards the timber's edge. But my compass told me the direction was north, and Beniah made me understand by signs that this was the "last wood." It loomed up almost like a forest; but when we reached it, late in the afternoon, it proved to be not more extensive than about five acres. But all things go by comparison, and those five acres of scattering small pine were as gratifying to us as though they had made a Maine forest. Most of the trees averaged from one to two inches in diameter, though there were some twice as large, and I noticed a very few that might have been five or six inches. At any rate, it all blazed warmly, and it was pleasant after our experience in the Land of Little Sticks to feel the heat of a fire once more. How deeply I was to appreciate that fire a few weeks later!

Beniah signed me next morning that we should camp here one "sleep," to chop wood to take along with us, and to kill caribou to cache here for our return. But in fact we remained at the "last wood" two "sleeps," because the caribou were not to be had easily, and the stormy weather developed into a blizzard that delayed

travel. The first day served to give me an object-lesson as to the deception of distances on the Barrens.

All the Indians had hunted unsuccessfully in the morning and returned to wood-chopping in the afternoon, and I determined to venture after caribou, as I knew, with this patch of timber visible from any ridge within five miles or so, I could not lose myself. I had gone, I suppose, about six miles when, by the aid of my field-glasses, I counted five caribou a couple of miles away, at the edge of a lake, and noted that a very strong wind was blowing, and, to my good-fortune, from them to me. It is difficult to approach game in this country, notwithstanding its vales and mounds, because the caribou are almost invariably viewed first on a lake or at its edge, to which the undulations descend in continuous long sweeps. But I made a careful stalk, crawling from rock to rock and from snow-drift to snow-drift, and finally reached a point beyond which there was no hope of undiscovered approach. I judged I was about three hundred yards from my quarry, and as they were quietly grazing broadside to me, confidently counted on taking at least a couple of tongues into camp.

MEDICINE-MAN'S NECKLACE

I raised my sight to 300 yards; a quick, steady aim, and I pulled trigger for the first time on Barren Ground caribou. But no caribou fell, nor was there any little puff of snow to tell me I had shot over or under. Three times in rapid succession, but with careful sighting, I fired at the

THE "LAST WOOD"—LAYING IN A SUPPLY OF FOOD FOR THE BARRENS
From a Photograph by the author

same animal with the same results, and before I could reload my half-magazine the caribou were off around a point. That I was disgusted is hardly necessary to say; that I was bitterly disappointed those sportsmen who have lost their supper by poor marksmanship will know. But my wonder at not having scored on such a big target —for all five were bunched—was greater than my disgust or disappointment. I walked over to see if I had drawn blood, and, reaching the place where the caribou had been standing in what seemed an incredibly short 300 yards, I paced back, and, to my amazement, found the distance measured just 105 yards! I had, of course, shot far over them. But I was thankful to have made this discovery before reaching musk-ox, even though it had cost us much needed meat, and I vowed on the spot to at once begin schooling my eye to the illusions of the white desert.

I followed the caribou for a while, in hopes of getting another chance, but they had gone too far; and then, as I headed for camp, I began my first lessons in Barren Ground distance-gauging by guessing the yards to a stone and then pacing them off. I was not only astonished at the discrepancy between my guess and the actual distance, but oftentimes by the size of the rock when I reached it. A stone which looked as large as a cabin at four or five hundred yards would turn out to be about as big as a bushel basket. Later, on the one or two very clear cold days we had, the illusion was reversed. Of course the difficulties of determining distances on the Barrens are exactly similar to those that obtain on the ocean, where there is nothing by which to gauge the range of one's vision, nor any object on either side for a comparative focus. I found much difficulty in overcoming the tendency to exaggerate distance, though the Indians apparently were not so troubled.

When I returned to camp that night the Indians had finished chopping the supply of wood we were to take, and likewise during the day finished the remnants of the feast left from the day before, so that again we were without meat. We were to have left the "last wood" the next morning, but the thermometer registered 58° below, and a blizzard of such severity raged that the Indians would not face it; so we lay in our robes until about three o'clock, when the fury of the storm lessened, and everybody turned out to hunt. When we assembled again, four hours later, there was a yearling for the dogs, an unborn calf for us, and a cow that had not been brought in.

The temptation to linger here, where at least there was a fire to warm our empty stomachs, was considerable; but the morning of the third day broke clear, though with such a biting wind as almost took our breath away, and we realized that the caribou were leaving us, and there was no time to lose. So now we began our last preparations for the plunge into the Barren Grounds proper. We calculated on getting back to this point in about twenty days, and were taking that many nights' supply of wood, intending to push due north for from ten to twelve days. The wood we took from the largest trees to be found in that patch, and was cut into blocks just the width of a sledge—*i.e.*, about fourteen inches—and then split into quarters, because we were to take no axe. Every sledge was shod with extra runners to protect it from the rocks, and when loaded with the wood there was hardly room for our sleeping-robes and moccasins and duffel. Then we cached the caribou cow that had been killed the day before, along with my rebellion-inciting balls of pemmican, the ten pounds of flour, half of my remaining supply of tobacco, tea, and cartridges, and every article that was not absolutely necessary to our continued progress. I wrote

also and left in the cache a brief account of our journey up to that time, and of the course we intended to pursue.

Not far to the westward the Franklin party, seventy-five years before, had raised a monument to their memory in the name of Fort Enterprise, and though I had neither time nor tools, not even the wish, to raise a fool's sign-board in warning to others, I thought it as well to leave some remarks at the threshold of that great wilderness, where those that enter may leave hope behind, but will stand a better chance of getting out if they take it along with them.

## XVIII

### IN THE BARREN GROUNDS

WHEN we left the "last wood," toiling over the succession of rocky ridges that lay to the north, a curiously depressing sensation possessed me as I viewed the "last wood" grow smaller and smaller. Piece by piece its size diminished as the intervening elevations shut off the outlying patches. It seemed like bidding farewell to the last tie that connected us with the living world—and then at the next ridge it was gone, and not a green thing relieved the awful ghastliness of the whiteness that encircled us for miles and miles. Wherever I looked—north, south, east, west—nothing showed but that terrible stretch of silent, grinning white. And the sun shone down on this desolate scene and on me as placidly as it shone upon the most blessed of God's world, if with less warmth!

There was no halting once we had climbed the long reach of ridges that led north from our camp and passed out of sight of the "last wood." It was absolutely necessary for us to make good time if our wood was to carry us as far north as I wished to penetrate, and I was much pleased with Beniah for the pace he set. In fact, I never ceased to be thankful that I had secured him, for not only did we maintain a good gait in the face of the hardest going, but we continuously faced such storms as would have stopped any other leader. Beniah was a plucky Ind-

ian, the pluckiest in the country. That was why I made such an effort to get him.

We must have gone close to forty miles the first day, and at noon of the second came to a big lake the Indians called, as near as I can write it, *Ecka-tua* (which means fat water—lake), and I was able for the first time since leaving Beniah's lodge to about locate myself on the map. *Ecka-tua* on the map, as I knew, is Point Lake, the source of Coppermine River; and as I also knew it was 334 miles from Fort Enterprise to the mouth of the Coppermine by canoe, *viâ Ecka-tua*, I was sure we could get very close to the Arctic Ocean, travelling due north, at the rate we had been going. I had no sextant, and relied for determination of location upon the deflection of my compass needle (which at this point was 35° east of north), and upon the number of miles we made each day. The number of degrees of deflection I read at night, when it did not storm, by the north star, and the number of miles per day is easily reckoned by every man who has had any walking experience. Besides, I had a pedometer.

*Ecka-tua* was full four miles wide at our point of crossing. We had no meat to eat and no wood to spare for mid-day tea, so we pushed on, running, which was rather trying on fare limited to an occasional pipe and a mouthful of very dry snow. We were keeping, of course, a sharp lookout for caribou all this time, and, besides having scouts out on either side, we halted on the top of every ridge that was high enough to furnish a view, where I scanned the country on all sides through my glasses, and we all smoked another pipe and tried to suck some moisture from the snow. There is a difference in eating snow and sucking the moisture from it; neither is satisfactory, but the former is harmful to the traveller, and pretty certain to be followed by increased thirst and cramps.

Late in the afternoon, from the top of a ridge, we viewed a small herd of eight caribou on a lake below us, and I witnessed the first practical demonstration of the reason why the Indians are such unsuccessful hunters. On the discovery of the caribou the dogs had been driven back just under the brow of the hill, where they were left in charge of half our number, and the rest of us prepared for the attempt to get some meat. The wind was blowing from east to west, and I was surprised to see two of the Indians going off to the east side of the caribou.

I circled well to the west, though not too far away to keep Beniah, who was on my right, in sight. I had worked my way down to the lake, and was making a good stalk, with every chance of getting within nice range, when the shouting of the Indians and yelping of the dogs attracted my attention, and, lo and behold! coming down the hill straight for the caribou, and in plain view, were the dogs and the Indians, some riding on the sledges, some running, but all yelling and bearing down on the caribou. Was ever a greater shock visited upon the nerves of a still-hunter! It simply petrified me. I stopped and stared and rubbed my eyes to make sure that those running, shouting Indians were actually the ones I had left a few moments before trembling in anticipation of meat to eat.

Of course the caribou started to run. They circled around the lake for a time (showing when they trotted such knee and hock action as would put the hackney to shame), all the Indians and the dogs chasing them meanwhile, and finally turned off over the ridge, where an Indian who had lingered behind was lucky enough to kill one.

I was so disgusted at the display that I sat down and pondered why God in His wisdom had made these men,

CARIBOU IN SIGHT

whose very existence depends on their hunting, so wanting in skill and judgment. Had it been less serious I should have been amused by the spectacle of a snow-shoed Indian chasing the fleetest quadruped on earth. As it was, I could not suppress a smile—in irony, perhaps.

And this is the Northland Indian's method of hunting caribou. Sometimes when hunting singly or in pairs they make the nearest approach they know to a stalk; but the usual method, invariable when they are in a body, is to rush on to the caribou, and trust for success to their own numbers and the confusion of the animals. If it were not that the Barren Ground caribou or reindeer is a stupid sort of creature, the Indians would score no oftener than they do on moose or the woodland caribou. But the reindeer appears to profit no more by experience than the Indians themselves.

After this experience of caribou-hunting I joined no more "chasing" parties; I was having every day all the running I could well attend to, and so thereafter when we sighted reindeer I devoted myself to stalking those that had been cut off from the main body. But never in all my life have I seen such wretched marksmanship as those Indians displayed. They not only miserably bungled their approach to the caribou, but their indiscriminate firing and the commotion they and the dogs created made it about impossible for me to get within range.

Not the least trying of Barren Ground hunting is the bewildering glare that assails your eyes when you have put up your glasses, as you must so soon as you start in pursuit of game. Even the darkest of smoked goggles, and, what are still better, those of native manufacture, that are made of bone, with only a T-shaped aperture before the eye, cannot insure you against snow-blindness. There were very few bright days during our wanderings

in the Barrens; nevertheless every man in the party but myself was more or less severely snow-blind, one or two so badly as to necessitate their holding on to a sledge-line for guidance.

As I had in times past been very badly snow-blinded, I took extraordinary precautions in the Barrens; for the thought of getting up with musk-oxen and being unable to sight my rifle was unendurable. So I drew the handkerchief that was wound about my head in lieu of a hat down to the tops of my goggles. This kept the sun from shining down in my eyes, while little pieces of black silk fitted to the wire screening at the sides shut out all light from that direction. I always walked behind my sledge, and kept my eyes on the tail of its moose-skin wrapper. While my eyes pained me incessantly, as much from the smoke of the tiny fire in the lodge as from the glare of the sun, I was never snow-blind.

Referring again, before I go on with my trip, to the handkerchief I wound about my head after the Indian fashion, I may say it served me better than all the other head-gear I possessed. I had set much store by a worsted hood knitted for me in Canada, with a neck-piece that fitted about the chin, and a draw-string by which I could close it up to my eyes. But I found it more harmful than beneficial, for the reason that the freezing of my breath transformed its entire front into a sheet of ice, which it was impossible to thaw by our wretched fire, and served only to freeze my face more quickly than exposure. For the same reason I carried a small pair of scissors to keep my beard and mustache clipped short. So the worsted hood was discarded, and the handkerchief held my hair, which reached nearly to my shoulders, in place over my ears, and permitted me to draw the hood of my fur capote forward and bind it snugly in place. Of course

my cheeks and nose and chin froze, but they would have done so anyway, and I could thaw them out by rubbing with snow—a limbering process to which the worsted hood was not susceptible. To be sure, the method was rather hard on my face, which by the time I returned to Beniah's lodge was as blackened and cut up as an alligator-skin; and it was hard on my fingers too, which froze with about every treatment of this sort, but that was no more than I expected. So long as my feet did not freeze to stop my progress, I suffered all else without a murmur. I was as careful of my feet as of my eyes. There was not much danger of their freezing during the almost continuous running of the daytime, and at night when we camped my first act was to put on my unborn musk-ox-skin slippers and a pair of fresh duffel, which I carried inside my shirt, next my skin; then I would put on two more pair of duffel and a pair of moccasins, taken from my sledge. Those I took off I put inside my sweater and slept on them. In the morning I again put my musk-ox-skin slippers and one pair of duffel inside my shirt, where I carried them all day.

But then these are details—and probably uninteresting ones—and I must get on to my first musk-ox hunt.

## XIX

### THE FIRST MUSK-OX

TWO days more of hard running, in a wind that seemed to come direct from the north pole, brought us—we did not know where, but certainly once again to the verge of starvation. Meat there was none, and the little pieces of intestines and grease were not calculated to keep one up to such vigorous work. There had been no change in the country; indeed, the entire stretch of Barren Ground, so far as I saw, repeats over and over again its few characteristics. Probably as you go north it becomes a little more rolling, if I may use such a word, where its face is broken by ridges of rock, round-backed and conical hills, small lakes, long, slow-rising, and moderate elevations, all entirely unconnected and separated from one another, and yet the view from an especially prominent elevation always reveals the general prairie (rolling) contour of the whole benighted country.

And everywhere silence; no sign of life, no vegetation, save the black moss that is used for fuel in summer by the Indians, and the gray moss and lichens upon which the musk-ox and caribou feed.

A glutinous soup is made by starving Indians on their summer trips from one kind of lichen, and there is a weed from which a substitute for tea is brewed in times of extremity.

It was about three o'clock when we dragged ourselves

wearily to the top of one of the many rocky ridges we had been going up and down all day, almost dreading to make the usual survey for the game we had looked for so often and in vain during the last two days. One quick, eager glance, that turned to despair as neither musk-ox nor caribou was to be seen in any direction, and we sat down to draw consolation and nourishment from our pipes.

Suddenly keen-eyed Beniah jumped to his feet, and then on top of a rock, where he stood excitedly pointing to the northwest, and tremulously repeating "*Ethen! ethen!*" as though to convince himself that his eyes were not playing him false. We were all standing in a second, staring into the horizon where Beniah pointed; but I could not discover anything, except what seemed to be a vapor coming up out of the rocks four miles away, and that I did not at once recognize as the mist which arises from a herd of animals when the mercury is ranging between 60° and 70° below zero, and may be seen five miles away on a clear day. A long look through my field-glasses told me the "rocks" were animals of some sort, but not caribou; and as I handed the glasses to Beniah I said, "*Ethen, illa,*" and motioned him to look. I think he was nearly as much exercised by the power of the glasses as by the prospect of game; at all events, so soon as he got them ranged on the vapor he set up a yell that I interpreted to mean *ejeri*, and made a rush for his sledge.

Instantly there was excitement enough on top of that ridge to put life into eight hungry men. I never beheld such agitation. The Indians for a minute huddled together, chattering and grinning and gesticulating, and then each man rushed to his sledge and began slipping his dogs from the harness. I knew then we had sighted musk-ox. Of course I had suited my action to the Indians', and began unhitching my dogs also, but my harness

came from the fort and had buckles, which in the bitter cold were unyielding, and by the time I had got all my dogs loose, put on my lighter capote—for I saw we were in for a long run—and strapped on my cartridge-belt, all the Indians and all the dogs had several hundred yards' start, and were going along at a rattling pace. I saw at once that it was every man for himself on this expedition, and if I got a musk-ox I should have to work for him. And then I settled grimly to the business of running. Within about two miles I had caught up with the Indians, who had stretched out into a long column, with Seco and Echeena leading by half a mile. In another mile I had worked my way through the stragglers, and was hard on the heels of Echeena, but Seco was still about two hundred yards ahead, and going as though he could keep it up indefinitely. On my attempt to pass him Echeena let out a link, and I had all I could do to keep at his heels, but in our race for second place we cut down Seco's lead by a hundred yards.

All this time we had been running over a succession of sharp ridges, completely covered with all shapes and sizes of rocks, and set in snow that was soft and about a foot and a half deep. With tripping shoes we of course sank in the snow at every step to within six inches of our knees, while our shoes jammed in the rocks that lay close together, or caught on those we attempted to clear in our stride. It was a species of hurdle-racing, with the softest of take-off and landing sides, and obstacles that were not to be knocked over. It was going that would test the bottom of the well-fed, best-conditioned athlete; how it wore on a half-starved man may be imagined.

It seemed as though we should never view the musk-oxen. Ridge after ridge we toiled over, and still that little cloud of vapor appeared as far off as when first

sighted. Our positions remained unchanged—Seco leading with three dogs, Echeena and I a hundred yards behind, and half a mile back of us the remainder of the Indians and dogs. At such times as the deadly fatigue of running permitted coherent thought I wondered why Seco maintained such a pace, for I supposed when the musk-oxen were located he would of course delay his attack until all the Indians and dogs had come up; but I had seen enough of the Indians not to take any chances: and so I kept on, each step seeming the last I could possibly make.

As we were working our way up a rather higher and broader ridge I heard the dogs bark, and, rushing past Echeena, reached the top in time to see a herd of about twenty-five to thirty musk-oxen, just startled into moving along another ridge about a quarter-mile beyond by Seco, who with his three dogs was racing after them not fifty yards ahead of me. Disgust, disappointment, and physical distress momentarily stupefied me. Then the sight of the musk-oxen, and the thought of what I had endured to reach them, fired me to renewed action. I anathematized Seco and all the Northland Indians for their fool methods of hunting, and increased my pace. The musk-oxen were now in full run to the north along the top of the ridge, galloping like cattle, with heads carried well out, though not lowered, and going at a pace and with an ease over the rocks that surprised me. Their big bodies, with the long hair hanging down to emphasize the shortness of legs, gave a curious appearance to the flying herd.

The wind was blowing a gale from the south, and we had hardly reached the top of the ridge on which the musk-oxen had been running when they disappeared over the northern end of it. By the time I reached the end of the ridge the main herd was a mile away to the north,

and still going, but four had separated from the band, and were running through some hollows that bore almost due east. I instantly determined to follow these four—because I saw I could get to the leeward of them, and I felt they would eventually head north to rejoin the herd. A caribou always circles up wind, but musk-oxen travel in any direction that necessity demands. Seco, with his dogs, was just ahead of me, keeping after the main band, and Echeena I had lost sight of. I knew that separation from the Indians might cost me my life, but musk-ox was the first and life the secondary consideration at that moment. And I started off at my fastest gait to the north-east, keeping a ridge between the musk-oxen and me, and knowing if they crossed ahead to the north I should come on their tracks.

ONE OF THE FIRST STEEL KNIVES TRADED TO INDIANS

I do not know how far I ran, or how long I ran; I only remember that after a time the rocks and the snow whirled around me at such a pace I could not distinguish where one began and the other ended; the great, dull, dead white surface before me appeared to rise and fall, and when I tripped over a rock I seemed to tumble a hundred feet and to take a hundred years to regain my feet.

Sometimes I had to pull myself up on to my feet by the aid of the very rock which perhaps had laid me low. Once I lost my snow-shoe, and though it was really not a yard away, I started on a run after it—it seemed so far off. Everything looked as though I were peering through the wrong end of my field-glasses. As I ran, my eyes pained me exquisitely, and I remember the horrible possibility occurred to me of my right eye (which is, in fact, much

weaker than my left) going snow-blind by the time I got within shot of the musk-oxen.

And as I reached the bottom of each ridge it seemed to me I could not struggle to the top, even though a thousand musk-oxen awaited my coming. I was in a dripping perspiration, and had dropped my capote and cartridge-belt, after thrusting half a dozen cartridges into my trousers pockets, and my nine-pound 45.90 weighed thirty. I hardly knew whether I were going up ridges or down ridges. Everything waltzed about me. I ran on and on in a sort of stupor, until, as I got to the top of a little ridge, I saw two musk-oxen about a hundred yards ahead of and running easily though directly from me. And then the blood surged through my veins, the mist cleared from my eyes, and the rocks stopped whirling about me, for there, within range, was my quarry. I swung my rifle into position and dropped on my knee for surer aim. Heavens! my hand shook so that the front sight travelled all over the horizon, and my heart thumped against my side as though it would burst. I had sense enough left to realize my shot might mean success or failure—for I felt my force was nearly spent.

For a moment I rested to get my breath—and the musk-oxen were still going from me—and then—another attempt—the fore sight for an instant held true—another second's breathing—a quick aim—and I pressed the trigger. What a feeling of exultation as I saw my quarry stagger and then drop! I was dizzy with delight. I gave vent to a yell, which, together with the report of my rifle, sent the other musk-ox into a wild gallop. It turned sharply to the left and went over a ridge, with me following on a run, all the while endeavoring to throw another cartridge into my rifle barrel. But the excessive cold, aided probably by my excited action, handicapped the mechanism, and the shell jammed.

By the time I had sent the cartridge home, running meanwhile, I got over the ridge, and was just drawing a bead on the galloping musk-ox, when two shots in quick succession turned it staggering, and as it dropped I sent a bullet where it would do the most good—just as Echeena and one dog came running down from a ridge opposite. So that I and Echeena had the honor of scoring the first and second musk-ox. Then I went back over the ridge to look at the one I had brought down. It was a cow. The sex was a disappointment, to be sure, and I should not take this head that had cost me so much to secure; but nothing could dull the joy of having, after a tramp of (about) twelve hundred miles, killed the most inaccessible beast in the whole wide world.

After I had made sure the musk-cow was really dead, I started again and to the north, hoping I might get on the track of the other two or some other stragglers from the main herd. Probably I went several miles farther, buoyed up by the excitement of my success, but saw the tracks of no living thing.

The sun was setting as I turned around to go back to my musk-cow, where I supposed the Indians would bring up sledges and camp, and I had walked some time when I realized that, other than going south, I had not the remotest idea in what precise direction I was travelling, or just where that musk-cow lay. I could not afford to waste any time or lose myself, for I had no capote, and the wind I was now facing had frozen my perspiration-soaked shirts as stiff and hard as boards. So I turned about and puzzled out my always half and sometimes wholly obliterated snow-shoe tracks back to where I had gone in my continued search for musk-oxen, and from thence back to my fallen quarry, where I arrived about nine o'clock, to find, sure enough, the lodge pitched,

and the Indians feasting on raw and half-frozen musk-ox fat.

Gnawing a piece of this fat, and hardly able to crawl with the cold and fatigue, I followed back my tracks from here until I found my capote and belt. It was nearly midnight before Seco, badly frozen, turned up to report the killing of two musk-oxen, and we had tea (for the little fire is never kindled until all are in, because the tea would freeze in a very few minutes after making). Several of the men were snow-blind, and what with their groans, the fighting of the dogs over the frozen musk-cow, my ice-coated shirts, to thaw which there was not warmth enough in my body, and a 67°-below-zero temperature, the night of our first musk-ox killing was memorable.

## XX

### THE MUSK-OX AT HOME

THE musk-ox (*Ovibos moschatus*) seems to be the missing link between the ox and the sheep. Their teeth are like those of a sheep and their feet like those of the ox. They are said also to have sheep's kidneys, but, although I saw them many times, my ignorance on the general subject of kidneys prevented my recognizing a similarity. Indeed, in appearance, especially when running and with their curling horns, it is not difficult to fancy them a huge well-fleeced old ram scampering off.

When full grown the musk-ox is about two-thirds the size of a bison and about as large as the average of the English black cattle.

The Indians estimate the flesh of a mature musk-cow equal to about three Barren Land caribou, and the bull would weigh, I should say, at least two hundred pounds heavier.

They are gregarious, and travel in herds that number, as near as I could determine from observation and investigation, from ten to twenty. Larger herds of course are seen occasionally, but fifty would be an unusually large number.

At the time of my visit to the Barren Grounds, *i. e.*, March and April, we found the bulls and cows together, though the number of cows very largely predominated. One herd we encountered was all bulls; another all cows, saving a few yearling and two-year-old bull calves.

MUSK-OX
Photograph from a specimen mounted by F. S. Webster.

As a rule each herd of ten to fifteen cows has one or two bulls.

When they are attacked — and their archenemy is the arctic wolf — they form a circle, with the calves inside, rumps together, and heads facing the enemy.

Their range is from about the 65th degree of latitude north to the Arctic Ocean, and from Hudson's Bay on the east to the Coppermine River on the west. Formerly they were found as far west as the Mackenzie River, but few, if any, have been seen in that vicinity for a dozen years. Outside of this extreme northern portion of North America, Grinnell Land, and North Greenland, the animal is found nowhere else in the world. Fossils have been unearthed in Siberia, Greenland, Alaska, and northern Europe showing its range formerly to have been very much extended, but now it is not known to exist beyond the Barren Grounds and the arctic islands.

The robe is a very dark brown, which against the snow looks almost black. Beginning at the top of the shoulders is a lighter streak of hair, which at about the middle of the back broadens out to a spot of dirty grayish white about a foot in width, but that narrows again into a small strip as it disappears towards the rump.

The tail is short, like that of a bear, and not visible because of the great quantity of long hair on the stern.

All over the body the hair is very long, extending below the belly, and to a greater length (from fifteen to twenty inches about) on the hind-quarters and under the throat and chest, where it hangs almost like the mane of a horse. At the root of this hair grows a coat of mouse-gray wool of the finest texture, which protects the animal in winter and is shed in summer.

There seems a decided tendency to a hump, which is accentuated by the longish, stiffish hair that stands

erect at all times over the shoulders and the base of the neck.

The bones of the musk-ox are massive.

The legs have no wool covering beneath the hair, and are very large and not long, though not so short as they appear because of the hair reaching nearly to the knees and to the hocks.

MUSK-OX HOOF—FRONT VIEW

The hoofs are large, with curved toes, and somewhat concaved beneath, like the caribou, which enables them to climb the rocky ridges with great facility and to scrape away the snow in their search for lichen and moss. For this purpose they use also their horns, which are admirably hooked for the work.

The growth of horns in both bulls and cows is rather interesting. They begin by a straight shoot out from the side of the head, exactly like domestic cattle, and for the first year it is impossible to tell the sex by their heads alone. In the second year the bull horn is a little whiter than the cow, and the latter begins to show a downward bend. The cow's horns are about fully developed at the third year, while the bull's are just beginning to spread at the base. This enlargement at the base extends towards the centre of the forehead, meeting in the median line, and showing between the horns a little of the short, curly, grayish hair which sprinkles the entire forehead of the two-year-old musk-ox, but is seen only at this crevice

in the aged. In its sixth year and thereafter this crevice opens, so that in an old bull it is from an inch to an inch and a half.

In the cow this crevice opens by age also, and to even a greater extent than in the bull. The head of the two-year-old musk-ox bull looks very much like that of the two-year-old wood-bison cow I saw. The foreheads of both are sprinkled with short, curly, grayish hair, only that of the musk-ox is whiter. The hair on the forehead of aged musk cattle is straight, rather long, and very dark —nearly black.

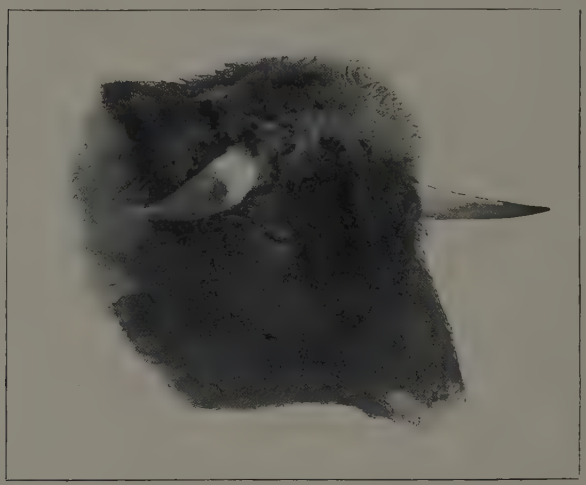
Both the musk bull and cow horns darken as they reach their full development, until from the tip for six or eight inches towards the base the horn approaches black. But after their full development, and as the animals age, this extreme darkness disappears, until finally in a very old animal of either sex there will be but a tip of black on the very point of the horn. It is by the extent of this black on the point of the horn that the Indians reckon the musk-ox's age.

MUSK-OX HOOF—BOTTOM VIEW

In both bull and cow as the crevice widens the base of the boss on either side thickens, until in the bull it reaches a depth of horn at least three inches, though in the cow will not exceed two.

The horn of the boss is corrugated, but as it bends at the side of the head over the eye the roughness begins to disappear, until about the middle of the horn it attains

absolute smoothness, which extends to the very points. The horns of an aged bull of course vary in size, very much as do the horns of all other animals, but the difference is chiefly noticeable in the spread of the boss, thickness of horn at the median line, and width of crevice.



TWO-YEAR-OLD MUSK-OX BULL

The largest head I killed and brought out measures from top to bottom of the boss at the median line $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches, while the length of horn from median line to point measures $27\frac{1}{2}$; width of crevice, $1\frac{1}{3}$ inches; thickness of horn at crevice, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches. This, the Indians said, was an unusually large one, and certainly the crevice at the base was wider than in any other bull I saw of the forty musk-oxen we killed on the trip.

In the cow the width of the boss does not vary very much, and would average less than half of the width of

that of the average bull. The boss does not grow out of the skull, nor is it a part of it, like the horn, but is separated from it by a layer of something like gristle that is a good half-inch thick.

Thus it may be seen that the only vulnerable spot in the musk-ox head is at the crevice. I do not from actual experience know a bullet would penetrate the skull at that point, but my observations in cutting up a head to study its formation rather convinced me it would.

The flesh of the musk-ox is coarse and exceedingly tough and unpleasant to eat, both from the difficulty of chewing it as well as from its rank flavor. In taste it does not resemble that of any other wild animal, though it may be said to approach nearest probably that of the moose in spring. The marrow is very much coarser than that of the caribou, and has no such delicate flavor to commend it.

The cow flesh has much less of the musk taint, and in the yearling it is scarcely perceptible, but the older the bull the stronger the odor.

On the first insertion of your knife into the ox for the purpose of skinning him the first faint odor of musk that greets you is not displeasing, but as you continue it becomes exceedingly obnoxious. Nor does it seem to be secreted in a special gland, but rather to permeate the entire flesh. I found the musk-ox robe the hardest in my experience to remove. Its hide is very thick, and in the excessive cold in which one is obliged to work the task becomes herculean.

The cows calf (never more than one at a time) in June, and in the spring hunts of the Indians the unborn musk-ox is a twofold luxury to them. Its flesh is eaten like the unborn caribou, and its hide taken to the fort for trade. The unborn musk-ox hide is of the deepest brown imaginable, with a very fine, soft fur that would average

probably about from one-half to three-fourths of an inch in length. A few of these skins (through the Hudson's Bay Company) find their way to the civilized marts. Most of them, however, are used for trimming caribou-skin capotes and for making moccasins which are invaluable (fur side in and next the skin) in Barren Ground travel.

Considering its build, the musk-ox is a very fast runner, and goes over the rocky ridges at a pace and ease that are remarkable. They run bunched, rarely single file, and for the first several miles they are scared they will go at a pace that rivals that of the dogs. After a few miles of running, however, they settle down to a steady gallop, which, although heart-breaking to the following snow-shoe runner, gives the dogs an even chance at gaining on them. So soon as the dogs are at their heels the musk-oxen come to bay, and, forming a circle around the calves, with the rumps in, they present their formidable heads to the front. If there are only two or three of them they make the same formation. I have seen two when stopped stand rump to rump, and a solitary one back up against a rock. They always face the enemy. Here they will stand with heads lowered, making an occasional lunge forward, as though to hook the dog, but never breaking the circle. So long as the dogs bark at their heads they will stand until the very last one is shot down, but the instant the dogs relax their vigilance, especially if they are few in number, the musk-oxen will start on.

Strange as it may seem, the generality of Indian dogs are not very valuable aids in musk-ox hunting. Theirs is a craven nature, and but for the urgency imparted by the pangs of hunger they would be of little use in bringing the musk cattle to bay.

In attack, dogs evince a disposition decidedly gregarious. Overtaking a herd of flying musk cattle, they are pretty

apt, for instance, to devote all their attention to one or two of the stragglers, and surround them when they come to bay, while the rest of the musk-oxen go on unmolested. Should the dogs come from different points of attack and stop a herd in two or three small bands, unless the Indians come up very shortly the chances are that they will leave their respective herds and gather around the one held by the greatest number of dogs.

A pack of well-trained dogs could, and of course frequently these Indian dogs do, easily hold the herds of musk-oxen intact, and under such circumstances the killing becomes as the slaughter of domestic cattle in a pen. Were dogs so trustful, the only excitement of musk-ox hunting would be the running to where they were viewed.

Occasionally a painfully wounded ox may break the circle and stampede the herd, and a herd when stampeded is hard to hold again, because the dogs are difficult to manage in concerted attack; but such an occurrence is very rare.

The musk-ox usually stops when wounded, and shows little inclination to go on; and, as a rule, they will stand until the last one has been killed, narrowing their circle as their numbers diminish.

Despite the general belief of the Indians, I saw no instance where a musk-ox showed inclination to charge, and in one of the herds we stopped I could very easily have captured a yearling calf; in fact, I took a photograph of one while it was backed up against its dead mother, and subsequently had hold of it while it stood at bay before the dogs.

## XXI

### BARREN GROUND CARIBOU

THE Barren Ground caribou is the mainstay of the Northland Indian. It is his food, clothing, and means of trade. Without it his miserable existence would be impossible. From its hide are made the capotes worn by every man, woman, and child, and tanned of its hair it furnishes him with mittens, moccasins, and the *babiche* with which he laces his snow-shoes and binds his sledge-loads. Whatever he has of flesh, hide, or *babiche* over and above his own needs he trades to the company. No part of the caribou is wasted, except perhaps the hoofs and antlers, and even the latter at times are used for knife-handles.

The stomach and its undigested contents, mixed with blood and the liver torn into shreds, make one of the Indian's most savory puddings. The intestines in the Barren Grounds keep him from starvation when it is necessary to give the meat to the dogs, and in his lodge, boiled, are one of his most toothsome portions. The marrow is his rarest tidbit, and the eyes, ears, and tongue are all delicacies. In fact, from the tongue to the organs of generation there is not a part of the caribou that does not furnish food to the Indian.

In general appearance the Barren Ground caribou is very like the woodland caribou; the difference between them being in the lesser bulk and height and lighter color,

BARREN GROUND CARIBOU

and in the more sweeping curve of antlers in the Barren Ground species.

The average weight of the full-grown Barren Ground caribou bull I should say would be somewhere between 150 and 200 pounds, possibly a little less—of course I had no scales—whereas the woodland bull would probably average about 100 pounds heavier. The same relative difference would be evident in the cows of both species.

HEAD OF WOODLAND CARIBOU

The difference in color is especially noticeable in the young and in the female, which are very light, almost a yellowish white, in the Barren Grounds. James McKinley, of Fort Smith, once killed an albino Barren Ground cow.

The woodland is much darker in color, especially in the markings on the neck and belly.

The antlers of the Barren Ground caribou are longer, slenderer, and curve back over the shoulders in a longer sweep than the woodland caribou. They are not so heavy in beam, nor are the palmations so large.

The hoofs of both animals seem to be about the same, as far as I could judge, and very much concaved, and with their sharp knife-like edges are peculiarly adapted for running in the snow or on the lakes. They are the only animal in existence, I believe, whose back or accessory

chisel-shaped hoofs touch the ground in walking and running.

There seems to be a wide difference of opinion concerning these two animals held by those who have written on the subject, and many of them, so far as my observations go, are at fault. Some naturalists claim the antlers of the Barren Ground caribou are heavier than those of the woodland, but my assertion is to the contrary, and I am borne out by Mr. Warburton Pike and Mr. Henry Toke Munn, both of whom are experienced hunters, and spent some time in the Northland.

CARIBOU HOOF, SHOWING POSITION OF ACCESSORY HOOF

About the beginning of March the female Barren Ground caribou in small herds begin to work their way out into the Barren Grounds, reaching the arctic coast about the last of June, where they drop their young. The bulls remain in the woods until the latter part of April, when they too work out into the Barrens, and meet the returning cows about half-way, some time along the first of August. They remain together during September and October, the rutting season, when they again separate and move towards the timber. It is stated by some authorities that the females remain in the Barren Grounds the entire year. This is not true. They do stay out longer than the males, but as winter sets in they seek the shelter of the woods. The antlers are clear of their velvet by the first of October, and the bulls shed them in December, while the cows

hold them until about the first part of January. Two-year-old bulls and cows do not cast their antlers.

The skin of the caribou is at its prime for the purpose of capote-making in the month of August, when they have shed their heavy winter coat and grown their lighter summer one. In the early spring the hair is too thick and heavy, and apt to break and fall out, besides which the majority of the skins are perforated by the grub which have been laid by a species of gadfly on the caribou the previous summer.

There is another kind of fly that lays its eggs in the nostrils of the caribou, which results in a nest of grubs that makes its life miserable during early summer.

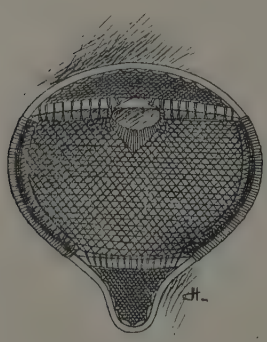
CARIBOU HOOF, SHOWING CONCAVE AND SHARP EDGES

Surely the caribou seems to be a much persecuted animal. It has many enemies besides the Indian, and none more implacable than the arctic wolves, which in summer are constantly on its track. It has been said that the wolverine attacks the caribou, but I failed to obtain corroborative evidence. The wolverine is an animal of extraordinary power for one of its size, but it is not swift enough to catch the caribou, nor has it the endurance to follow in a long chase like the wolf. It is the Northland scavenger, and steals after the wounded caribou or breaks into and robs the caches.

Probably the condition of being fat or lean makes a

greater difference in the taste of the flesh of the Barren Ground caribou than in that of any other animal, and there is no wild meat that one wearies of so slowly. In the early spring bulls and cows are exceedingly poor, and the flesh is not very nourishing. But in August and September they have become fat, and the flavor of the meat is really delicious. After the rutting season the bulls are poor again, and the cows are then usually sought by the Indians.

The range of the Barren Ground caribou is from the 60th degree of latitude to the Arctic Ocean and from Hudson's Bay to the Mackenzie River. This is speaking very generally. As a matter of fact, very few caribou get west of the Coppermine River or Great Bear Lake, and though they extend eastward to Hudson's Bay in great herds, yet only straggling numbers are found so far south as the 60th degree of latitude.



UNGAVA WOMAN'S SHOE,
Gulf of St. Lawrence,
20 inches long

Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake, which is the best-supplied meat post in the North country, is from four to six days' distance from the most southerly general range of the Barren Ground caribou, though to the eastward a few do get down to the northeast end of Athabasca Lake. Woodland caribou range, generally speaking, between the 50th and 60th degrees of latitude, although they are found to some extent in the extreme western part of British North America and in Alaska.

By all accounts there has been in recent years a very great decrease in the number of Barren Ground caribou in

British North America, though I am inclined to believe it not so great as generally supposed by the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company officers.

The Barren Ground caribou is very changeful in its migrations. The route it may pursue to the Arctic Ocean one spring may be a hundred miles east or west of that followed the previous year and that will be taken the succeeding year, and as the Barren Grounds contain three hundred and fifty thousand square miles (approximately), it may be seen there is ample room for the caribou to keep the Indians guessing on their whereabouts.

It is a fact that several of the Hudson's Bay Company forts originally established as meat posts and once the centre of caribou migration are now many days' journey to the side of it, but I incline to the belief that this is due largely to the caribou being driven away from those particular sections.

That their numbers have been largely decreased is undoubtedly true, for the annual slaughter visited upon them by the Indians in the summer-time is as deadly as it is incredible.

In midsummer, when the cows return from the Arctic Ocean and meet the bulls in the Barren Grounds, they are joined by other herds from the westward, and at that time the herds are simply enormous.

Tyrell, when he made his trip through the southern part of the Barren Grounds eastward to Hudson's Bay, saw herds that numbered thousands. And Mr. Warburton Pike, in his summer trip into the Barrens, was rewarded by a sight of this great caravan of moving caribou.

It is at this time that the Barren Ground caribou falls a victim to the rapacity of the Indians.

They are then moving in vast herds of countless numbers, are stupid and easily approached, or turned in de-

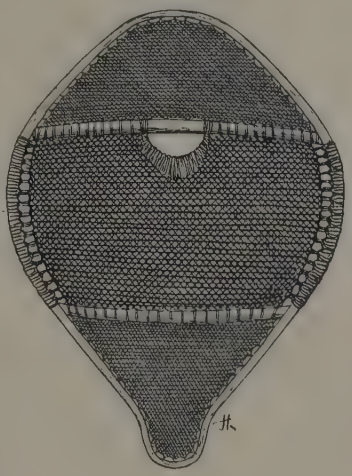
sired directions by tufts of moss or rock set up in lines, along which the Indians lie in ambush, or driven into lakes, where they are slaughtered by the hundreds. The waste in summer of these food-providing animals of the North on the lakes is almost incredible. Hundreds are speared and shot down merely for their tongues, their carcasses being left to rot where they have fallen, and calves are killed for no other reason than to gratify the Northland Indian's love of destruction. In winter the caribou's eyesight is keener; they are separated into small herds, and infinitely more difficult of approach. In following a leader they are very much like sheep, and I saw many of them killed by Indians who ran to a point where a herd was passing, and which continued to very nearly hold its course despite the proximity of the enemy. Caribou run in single or double file, and are very rarely bunched. If, therefore, the Indians starve because of unskilled hunting, it is only just retribution for their improvidence and rapacity. It was a bit hard on me that I happened at this particular time to be an innocent sufferer in the result.

Such wanton destruction must have had in a hundred years some appreciative effect in thinning the number of caribou, yet it is noticeable only by the restricted area of range, for there seems to be no diminishing in the size of herds; at least the herds continue so large it is impossible to discover any lessening in their numbers.

The passing of laws to restrict this slaughter has been agitated in the Canadian Legislature, but it is pretty safe to say nothing actually effective will ever be accomplished, for the very good reason that it would be utterly out of the question to police the Northland, certainly not the Barren Grounds; and even if that were possible, which is really absurd to even consider, nothing short of an army

could keep track of the Indians on their vast barren hunting-grounds.

These are the two animals, then, that find a living in the desolate wastes of the Barren Grounds, and the musk-ox is the only one that makes it his home from year's end to year's end. There are wolves and wolverines and arctic hares and arctic foxes to be found on the southern half of the Barren Grounds in winter, but I saw none of them after we had gone five or six days into the Barren Grounds.



UNGAVA SHOE,
Gulf of St. Lawrence.
3 feet long

The arctic fox is about half the size of a good big red fox, and the arctic hare is twice the size of the ordinary "rabbit" (so called, and incorrectly, for "rabbits" are really hares). The wolves are large. I saw only black ones and not very many of those. There is a Barren Ground bear, so called, that is exhibited in the Smithsonian Institute as coming from the Barren Grounds, but I believe it is wrongly accredited to this particular section.

A bear is found on the Anderson River, which is near the Rocky Mountains, that corresponds to this one, and it is possible it may make out into the Barrens in the summer-time, but I doubt if it is more than a visitor, and am convinced its real home is much nearer the mountains.

It is a peculiar-looking bear, seeming a cross between the grizzly and the polar, and it has this peculiarity, that its hind claws are as big as its fore claws, while its head looks somewhat like that of an Eskimo dog, very broad in the forehead, with square, long muzzle, and ears set on quite like the dog's. It is very wide at the shoulders, and its robe in color resembles the grizzly.

## XXII

### BEYOND THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

On the morning following our first musk-ox killing, the bare skeletons of the cow and bull told what good use the dogs had made of their opportunity. And it was considerable satisfaction to me when we broke camp to know that at least the dogs had something to travel on, even though our share of the feast had been very scanty.

We went to the musk-oxen Seco had killed, and there, after taking the robes, made a meal on the fat and replenished our supply of dog-meat. Then we took up our northward journey again.

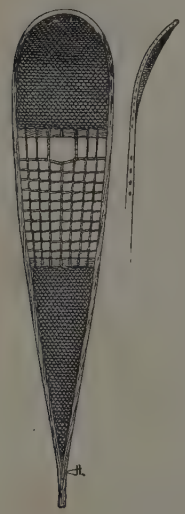
All day long we maintained a steady pace, with the weather remaining about as it had been the day before, except for a little more wind and a little less sun. We had hopes of following the tracks of the remainder of the herd Seco had chased so long the night before, but they had been covered by the drifting snow, and we had seen neither musk-ox nor caribou when we camped at night.

Another ten hours of travel in increasing cold, and the sun had gone down behind the clouds which all day it had been vainly endeavoring to dispel, and we were about camping, when from one of the little round-top hills we viewed two bands of musk-oxen. One of fourteen was galloping directly from us about two miles off; another of three was about a mile to the westward of the larger herd and running almost due west. Seco, two other Indians, and

myself, with several dogs, started after the three, which were going at right angles to the course we had been travelling, while the remainder of the Indians and dogs went after the fourteen.

After we had run about a mile the two Indians turned back, and with them all the dogs that had started with us but two.

Seco was about fifty yards ahead of me and going very fast. The more I saw of this Indian's running the greater my admiration grew for him. He was certainly a good runner, and, despite my utmost efforts, and I was going well too, I found it impossible to cut down his lead.



CO-YUKON SHOE
(Curved toe),
Yukon River,
4 feet long

Both our dogs had gone ahead, and we had run, I suppose, a couple of miles farther, the musk-oxen being hidden from us by intervening ridges for most of the time, when, reaching the top of one of the ridges, we saw the dogs holding the musk-oxen at bay.

Redoubling our exertions, for I felt the two dogs would not long hold our quarry, we crossed a couple of small, rocky ridges, that lay between us and them, and Seco, who had gained a little on me, got within about one hundred yards, when he fired both barrels of his muzzle-loader, and missed. Simultaneously with his shooting the dogs left the musk-oxen, which started on again, but more to the southward, and, as I had not stopped running, this put me fifty yards nearer them. Another half-mile of running brought me to within about one hundred to one hundred

and fifty yards, and I fired twice in rapid succession, dropping one and stopping a second, while the third went on, and with Seco and one of the dogs following. The remaining dog was already busily tearing at the throat of the fallen musk-ox.

MOCCASINS

The wounded bull continued travelling slowly in the direction the third had taken, and was, I saw, badly hit, but I put another ball in front of his hind-quarter and ranging forward, to keep him from wandering off farther, and he came to a standstill, though he did not fall.

I had heard a deal about wounded musk-oxen being dangerous, and thought this an excellent opportunity of discovering for myself whether the animal is so ferocious as the Indians report him. So I drew nearer, to within probably twenty-five yards, keeping, of course, a close watch on his movements and my rifle in readiness in case of attack.

On my approach the bull faced me. As I began slowly circling about him he kept turning so his head was always presented to me. Having made one circuit with no other demonstration on his part, I concluded he had no intention of charging, and I determined experimenting on the strength of the boss, which protects the entire top of his head. Taking careful sight, I fired. Other than a slight shake of the head the bull gave no evidence of being hit, and I afterwards discovered a small black spot where the bullet had struck on the top of the boss just at the side of the crevice. Then to see if the brain could be reached by penetrating the skull just at the lower edge of the boss, I fired a second time, but though my bullet crashed

through his forehead and blood gushed out of his mouth and nostrils, I had evidently not reached the brain, as he still stood on his feet. I confess it seemed anything but sport to stand there firing at a wounded animal that could not escape, and I had no heart for further experiments. I regret now I did not try the effect of a bullet sent directly into the crevice, for my subsequent dissection of a musk-ox head rather convinced me the brain could be reached if a bullet was sent home exactly on this spot.

Having satisfied myself that the boss was not to be penetrated, I began another circle with the idea of putting the ox out of misery by a final ball through his heart. He kept turning, always facing me, but other than an occasional stamp of his fore-foot like a sheep gave no indication whatever of rage or intended attack. In the midst of this performance there arose much shouting on the hill to my left, where I discovered the two Indians who had started with Seco and me waving their arms in apparently great perturbation of mind. Why, of course I did not know, but afterwards learned the cause of their excitement to be what they considered my imminent danger, and that they were calling on me to come away.

I should probably have been obliged to circle about that musk-ox until he dropped from sheer loss of blood, but the dog, unable to make any impression on the fallen musk-ox, left that and came over to the live one, and as he ran up barking the bull turned his attention to him, which gave me the desired opportunity, and down he went, making a couple of ineffectual attempts to get on his feet again before he expired.

I noted in my hunting, by-the-way, that once a musk-ox is down it seems impossible for him to get on his feet again. I saw a number make the attempt, but none succeed.

He had stood up fully fifteen minutes, and had my camera been at hand, instead of in the sledge several miles away, I could have secured a splendid photograph. But one cannot carry both rifle and camera and chase musk-oxen, and I wished to finish with my rifle before I began with my camera.

Afterwards, when going back to the sledges, it occurred to me that if the bull had charged my situation would

WILLOW BASKET USED BY INDIANS BEFORE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY TOOK IN COPPER KETTLES

have been rather uncomfortable, because they do not lower their heads in running, and it would have been no easy matter to get in a shot over his head into the shoulder, while to put a bullet fairly into that crevice, even assuming it to be fatal, would have been very difficult.

We skinned those two bulls, and went back to the sledges, where, rolled in our robes, we lay until ten o'clock,

when all the Indians but one had returned to report the killing of eleven musk-oxen. It had grown so much colder after sunset I was curious to see what the thermometer registered, but after looking I discovered it broken, undoubtedly by the pounding of the sledge in the last few days' rough going. Thereafter I had not the poor gratification of knowing just how low the mercury, or, rather, spirit (for, of course, it was a spirit thermometer), fell on some of the fearful days we had subsequently. From signs I learned the missing Indian (Seeyah) had discovered caribou tracks, and promptly abandoned the musk-ox trail.

While we made the little fire and boiled the tea we fired our guns in signal at intervals of probably ten minutes, but there was no response, and when we had finally settled ourselves for the night Seeyah was still wandering in the bitter cold. And what a night that was! First snow, afterwards sleet, and all the time a perfect hurricane of the wind that knows no cessation in the Barren Grounds. Sleep was impossible. Our lodge was blown full of snow, burying us and the dogs in its driftings, and was finally blown down altogether, and would have been blown away had we not held on to it.

Next morning we righted the lodge and shovelled out the snow with our snow-shoes, and then went our several ways to bring in the robes of the previous day's killing. I remember I had quite a task finding my musk-oxen, for the snow-shoe prints of the day before had been entirely obliterated by the night's storm. However, I did find them about three miles away, and a sorry sight they were to me, for the dogs had been at the throats and heads during the night, and torn one so badly that it was useless as a specimen. The other one was not so damaged, and I took it back to camp.

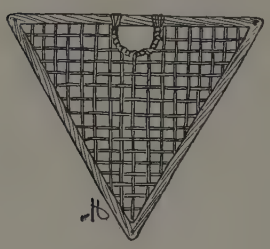
As I drew near the lodge I saw a living thing quite close to it, moving slowly, and evidently with great difficulty. It was a few appreciable moments before I discovered it to be the lost Seeyah. The Indians had evidently given him up as lost or forgotten him, as not a signal had been fired in the morning. Poor fellow, he was a miserable looking object, coated with ice from head to foot, and barely able to crawl.

None of the other Indians had returned from the musk-ox skinning, so I took it upon myself to care for him. I got out my pint of brandy, which, by-the-way, was frozen, not solidly, but so that it had the appearance of slush just at the point of congelation, and a cup of this I poured down his throat. Then I indulged in the extravagance of making a little fire to boil some tea, and ransacked the sledges for whatever there was to eat. I put before him all the intestines and pieces of fat I could find, and when he had thawed out sufficiently to move easily he fell upon them like a famishing beast. As a matter of fact, he ate steadily until he had devoured the last scrap, and I may say, incidentally, depleted our larder.

However, I felt there would be enough from the musk-ox killing for the dogs and ourselves, and was therefore reckless with provisions.

After a time the Indians returned with their robes and a sledge-load of meat for the dogs, and intestines and fat for ourselves, all of which was thrown inside the lodge. And such a looking place! more nearly like a slaughter-pen than a house of man. The intestines were hung from the lodge-poles, so that you could not see from one side of the lodge to the other, and when you passed out you crawled on hands and knees under this intestinal network and over the bloody flesh and hearts and livers and unborn calves that completely covered the ground.

While the mess was being stowed away, two Indians, armed with sticks of fire-wood, guarded the entrance of the lodge against the dogs, and several of us from the inside plied our whip-stocks on those dogs that in their ravenous hunger threw themselves on the lodge from without, in a mad effort to reach the meat and offal within.



ESKIMO SHOE,
18 inches long, Hudson's Strait

Three days more we headed northward in the severest weather yet encountered. It snowed practically all the time, and the wind whistled dolorously and by reason of its own velocity, for of course there was not a blessed twig or brush to prompt its shrill shrieking. The country seemed a little flatter, with great stretches rolling away into undulations of more or less prominence, and rather larger lakes and fewer rocky ridges than we had seen. We made long days, starting at sunrise and not camping until about half-past seven. We saw some caribou, but got only two. And the days wore on monotonously, and tryingly, too, for even greater than the pangs of hunger in my stomach was the constant dread in my mind that the Indians would become disheartened over the difficulties we were facing and turn back. And that would mean failure of my long, weary journey. So, when we stopped for a pipe, and threw ourselves to the leeward of our sledges for protection from the storms, I sang and tried to exhibit an indifference I did not feel to the obstacles besetting our progress. At night, when we camped, I sang some more, and tried to whistle, hoping by my actions to shame the Indians from showing

failing courage. How little I felt like singing may be imagined.

Night was indeed trying. We always camped on top of a hill, and pitched the lodge on the highest point of that hill, so as not to miss any of the force of the arctic zephyrs, but really, I believe, that the scouts sent out every afternoon hunting caribou might direct their steps to the lodge.

In camping there was an invariable argument as to the best of several different locations, and when a site had been finally determined the pitching of the lodge gave further excuse for discussion that to me was maddening.

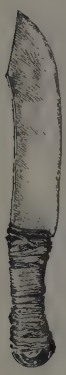
A lodge, or tepee, as some call it, is taken into the Barren Grounds more to protect the fire than the men. The high wind that blows continuously makes impossible the building of a fire from the little kindling into which the sticks are split, and even were a blaze started, the gale would not only quickly kill the flame, but sweep away the wood.

When a camping-ground has been chosen, a circle is made of the sledges, the three lodge-poles (tied together at the top) that form the triangle are stuck into the packs to give firm footing, and the remaining poles placed so as to make a cone of the triangle. Then the caribou-skin, revealing countless holes (about the size of a lead-pencil) the grubs have made, is stretched over the poles and outside of the circle of sledges. The lodge is set very low, so low that standing in the centre your head and shoulders will be out in the open.

Blocks of snow are then cut and piled around the sledges and on top of the caribou-skin, to keep it from being lifted by the wind. When this is completed, four to five of the sticks are taken from the sledges equally, so as to even the loads, and these are split into kindling-

wood with a big knife, which is at once the musk-ox hunting-knife and the Barren Ground axe combined. A shorter pole is lashed over the fire from side to side of the tepee on to the lodge-poles, and from this, by a piece of babiche with a forked stick tied to its end, are hung the kettles.

To give an idea of the size of the fire, I may add that by the time the snow has been melted and the water has come to a boil the fire has burned itself out. While it blazes and the tea is making, every one squats around, gazing wistfully at the flame and persuading himself he is being warmed; but as an actual fact no heat from the fire can be felt by the bared hand two feet away.



MUSK-OX HUNTING-KNIFE AND BARREN GROUND AXE

Tea made and drunk, you roll yourself in your robes, lying on your side, with your feet towards where the fire was and head against your sledge. With your knees into some Indian's back, and some Indian's knees into your back, and your snow-shoes under your head, away from the dogs, that would eat the lacing and strings, you compose yourself for sleep; but you do not get it—at least, not for a time.

So soon as everybody has rolled up for the night, the dogs, that have been fighting just without the lodge, and kept away only by the whips of the Indians sitting nearest the opening, pour in and continue their fights over the prostrate forms of the cold-storage tramps. Fifteen minutes of alternate fighting and searching for something to eat, and the dogs become comparatively settled for the night around and on top of the alleged sleepers.

It is rather comforting than otherwise to have a dog

OUR LODGE IN THE LAND OF LITTLE STICKS

From a Photograph by the author

curl up at your feet, but when you have one on top of your head, a second or maybe a third on your body, and yet another one on your feet, the comfort becomes one of fancy rather than of fact. You are wrapped so tightly in your robes you cannot move your arms or legs in an attempt to displace the dogs, and you do not attempt to sit up because that will open your blankets to the cold, and, moreover, so soon as you lay down again those dogs or some others would be on top of you; so you lie there and try to sleep, while your bones ache and you wonder how much inducement would take you on another Barren Ground trip.

The next day opened the bitterest of all. A northeast wind cut our faces as with a knife. It was utterly impossible to keep from shivering even in travelling. I cannot sufficiently describe how cold it was, and I do not know, since my thermometer was broken. When we stopped the dogs lifted their feet from the hard-packed snow as though it burned them, and your breath came and went in stinging gasps.

It was deadly travelling; nothing to break the fearful blast that drove into our faces with arctic fury. All day long we bent our heads to it, and I fell to comparing myself with the Wandering Jew, going on and on, and doubting if there really were to come an end to it all, and I should see the sun shine and hear the birds sing.

I knew we were now about ten days from the "last wood;" that we could go north not more than a day or two longer, as our sticks would not hold out, and I suffered mental torture as I thought of the possibility of not seeing any more musk-oxen. I thought of Munn's unrewarded trip into the Barrens; of the many parties of hunting Indians that had seen only cows; and I wondered if all my tramping was to result similarly. I had killed one

cow and two bulls, but had only one bull head to show for my work, and that one somewhat imperfect.

Following Seco, who was acting as foregoer, our seven dog trains stretched out in a long, plodding column. I was the fourth in the procession, toiling along, head down, and mind busy casting up the prospects. Suddenly my dogs stopped, and I stumbled over the tail of my sledge to discover the others in front had stopped, and we had bunched up like runaway freight-cars brought to a sudden and full stop. The Indians were loosening their dogs, and my heart leaped within me and I forgot the storm and my despair, for here I was to have another chance at getting the two heads I still wanted, and I prayed the herd sighted might prove to contain at least that many bulls.

We had been travelling up a long, narrow hollow between two ridges, and Seco, who was several hundred yards ahead of the leading sledge, had come on to the herd of musk-oxen before they discovered him, and then he had rushed back to stop the dogs.

Fortunately the storm was so fierce the dogs could not see the musk-oxen. As we advanced cautiously we came suddenly to where the snow was trampled and several tracks led off to the east. Evidently the musk-oxen had moved on, but not because of us, as the dogs had uttered not a whimper, and the wind was blowing strongly from the northeast and we were travelling almost due east.

Following the signs, we set off at a pretty brisk run, and this time I was up with Seco and determined to keep up with him until I dropped in my tracks, for I knew if we reached musk-oxen at all Seco would be there first, and I remembered I wanted two bulls and might not have another opportunity.

We ran for about a mile, and then suddenly saw a few hundred yards ahead ten musk-oxen, standing with their

rumps to the north, weathering the storm. They did not see us, but the dogs had discovered them and set up a yelping which the musk-oxen heard, and, turning instantly, started off on a run. They separated, some going straight ahead, and others turning sharp to the south over a ridge.

Seco went on ahead, but I turned southward and went over the ridge. Luck favored me, for as I reached the top I saw the musk-oxen had turned again, and that two of them were running due west and one southwest, while two others were going to the eastward, with some of the dogs in full chase. I went straight on, keeping just under the top of the ridge, and when the two musk-oxen came opposite me it was within about 100 yards. I fired twice, scoring each time. One dropped, and the other, I noted, was staggering as I threw another shell into my rifle and started after the third, that was a good bit to the south. About two more miles of running took me within fair range, and one shot brought him to a dead stop, where he stood until I had approached to within seventy-five yards and put another ball behind his shoulder that brought him down. All three were bulls—two of them the largest I had seen, and the third but very little smaller—and I delighted in the comforting realization that come what might thereafter, at least I had my three heads, and my trip to the Barrens was successful.

I was determined the dogs should not get a chance at the throats of these musk-oxen, so I set to work at once cutting off the heads, leaving the removal of the robes to the Indians.

It was a difficult job in that terrific cold and storm, and even with my gloves on work was possible for only a few moments at a time, when it was necessary to slap both hands vigorously to keep them from freezing. As it was

I had frequently to pull off my glove and stick my right hand, with which I was using my knife, into the warm stomach of the musk-ox.

That was a fearful night we put in, for the storm increased, and the howling of the wind was almost as mournful as the howling of the dogs that piled in on top of us.

Next morning the storm had developed into a blizzard. The wind blew directly in our faces; the snow was blinding; men and dogs were blown out of their tracks, and we could hardly make headway. And yet—it was a happy day; for three musk-ox heads were safely on my sledge (I discarded the damaged one), and we had reached our most northerly point.

We had had four days of continuous storming and bitterest cold—weather that no other Indian leader but Beniah would have faced. But cold and storm were insignificant now that the success of my trip was assured, and we should henceforth face the sun and turn our backs on the arctic coast.

Fortunately that night the storm ceased and the stars came out, and I read my compass by the North Star, and recorded its needle as showing a deflection of 47° east of north. I knew, therefore, we could be but two or three days from the Arctic Ocean, judging by the rate we had travelled, and by a comparison with the reading of Sir John Franklin's compass, which, when he descended the Coppermine River in canoes, was recorded on the 67th degree of latitude as 47° east of north. Judged also by my knowledge of distances, Yellow Knife River takes its source in latitude 64°, and is 160 miles long. The spot where Fort Enterprise is supposed to have stood is 29 miles from this river's source. Fort Enterprise by canoe to the mouth of Coppermine River is 334 miles; arctic

circle from King's Lake, at our point of crossing, about 210 miles; arctic circle to Arctic Ocean, about 80 miles.

We had been travelling from the "last wood" about eleven to twelve days, and from King's Lake thirteen to fourteen days. I found when I returned to Slave Lake that during my journey to the Barren Grounds I had lost a day somehow, and that is why I am not positive as to the exact number.

We had travelled a pretty good pace, and I was quite sure we were not much more than fifty miles from the Arctic Ocean. I made signs to Beniah that night, offering him a hundred skins to go down to the ocean. I do not know that he understood me; I am under the impression he did; at any rate, he declined, and I must confess I did not press my desire, for I was quite willing to turn round and face Great Slave Lake. It would have been exceedingly hazardous to go on to the ocean, because our wood supply was not sufficient to get us back to the "last wood," and we were by no means certain of meeting Eskimos. Besides, no one knew what our reception might be if we did meet them, for there is hereditary enmity between the Eskimos on the coast and the Northland Indians to the south.

ESKIMO KNIFE

About one hundred years ago the Dog-Ribs surprised a party of Eskimos several days south of where we then were and massacred them. That, I believe, is the only record of bloodshed between the nations or of their meeting; but it was all-sufficient to have made a lasting impression.

## XXIII

### SUPERSTITIONS AND TRADITIONS

EVERYBODY was in good humor that night in the lodge, and I was very much interested in watching the development, out of a caribou shoulder-blade, of an Indian hunting talisman. The shoulder-blade when finished becomes at once talisman and prophet. It is scraped clean of its flesh, and then with a piece of burned wood the Indian pictures upon it, first, the points of the compass, and then one or more hunters, with caribou in the distance. When his drawing is complete the blade is held over the fire, and the dark spots that appear in the bone indicate the direction in which game will be found. Where several hunters are represented in the drawing, that one nearest the spots is hailed the lucky individual.

CREE-INDIAN ORNAMENTS

The Indians have several superstitions pertaining to the disposition of game, but none more rigidly adhered to than that relating to the head of moose or caribou. It is considered exceedingly bad luck to the hunter if the jaw or any part of the head is eaten by the dogs, and it is North-country courtesy that the head invariably goes to the successful hunter for such dis-

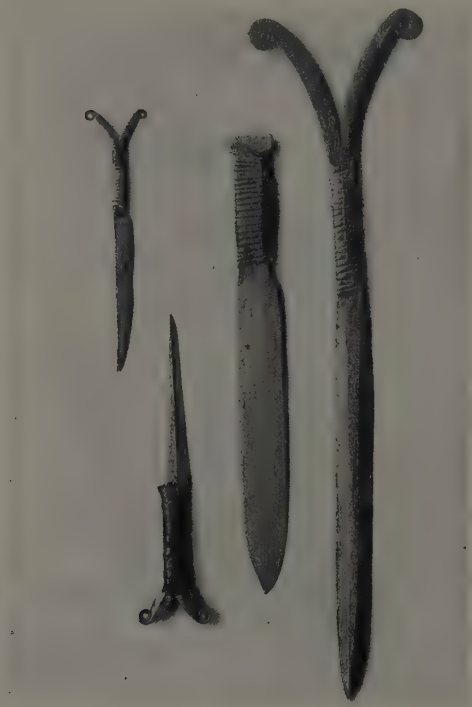
posal as he pleases. In the Barren Grounds, of course, the caribou head becomes the common property of the party, but the dogs never get any part of it. At the posts it is exceedingly difficult to trade a head from the Indians; and the Indian women never eat the chin, believing they would grow a beard if they did.

These Northland Indians are filled, in fact, with all sorts of ridiculous superstitions, but their traditions are few. That of the Barren Grounds seems to be very sensible. It sets forth that during a time of peace all the animals were killed for a grand feast, at which all the tribes were to gather on the Barren Grounds. An old woman who was trusted to watch the pots allowed the grease to run over, which fired the soil and burned up the entire country.

They are strong believers in reincarnation in animals. It has always been a belief among them that men and women after death pass into some of the wild beasts of the country. Many years ago, they say, a woman strayed into the Barrens among the musk cattle, and eventually became one. Because of this they believe the musk cattle understand their speech. It is quite common to hear the Indians jabbering, apparently to themselves, in their chase, but it is said they are really directing the flight of the musk-oxen. If this is true, either the Indians have slight consideration for themselves or the musk-oxen are distressingly disobedient, otherwise I imagine Beniah and his party would have commanded the bands we saw to give us less running. It is claimed, too, that the Indians do not chatter to any other animal; but this is not so, because I heard them when they were chasing caribou.

Still they do have a firm belief in the rehabilitation of the two-legged into the four-legged animal. I was assured in all seriousness by the interpreter at Great Slave Lake

that he knew an old man, who had died two years previous to my visit, who for three years at one time of his life had disappeared from his usual haunts, and on his return declared he had been a wolf. This was, and is to this day,



OLD COPPER KNIVES

implicitly believed by the Indians about Resolution, because there are still living many men who say that when hunting with this man, after his return from the wolf-state, he explained the meaning of the wolf's howling, and

forecast their movement with an accuracy that could not have been gained except by "being one himself."

Their tradition of the world's origin is rather quaint, but has a latter-day flavoring that to me seems to savor of missionary teachings. However, put into intelligible English from the interpreter's translation, it is as follows: For three years there had been excessive cold, with snow in summer as well as in winter, and all the rivers and lakes were frozen hard, even to the very bottom. So the fish and all other animals (which could understand one another) gathered for consolation and consultation. Fire being scarce, and the circle about it so deep, the squirrel was crowded out, and working his way through the legs of the larger animals, crept so close to the fire that he singed his back, and that is the reason his back is now yellow. After waiting a long time for a break in the weather, all the animals and fish determined to hunt up the heat. So they started off on their search, and after a while came to a doorway, which they concluded must be the entrance to heaven.

All entered, and found themselves in a warmer atmosphere. After going some distance they came to an open lake, on the bank of which was a bear and her cubs. Some of the heat search-party started to cross the lake, the opposite shore of which seemed green and full of life; but as often as they made an attempt the bear gave chase in her canoe and speared them. While the bear was thus occupied those on the bank entered upon an exploration that resulted in the discovery of the bear's lodge. Here, hanging up, they saw many bladders, which, in reply to their inquiry, the cubs that had followed them said, "The first one contains bad weather, the second rain, the next snow, etc." But the contents of the last bag the cubs would not disclose, and immediately the

visitors surmised it must contain the long-sought heat. So the most courageous of them grabbed it and started to make off, followed by the cubs, who cried, "My mother, my mother, they have taken the bag of heat!" This was the marauders' first intimation that the prize they had was, indeed, the one sought.

The bear joined in the pursuit, and forthwith began a chase for the possession of the bag. First the man took the bag, but the bear gained on him; then the jack-fish, but the bear still gained; then the loche-fish was given the bag, and the bear immediately began falling behind. As they went through the alleged gate of heaven the bag burst, and the heat spread all over the world. In no time the snow and ice of three years' accumulation had melted, and the waters began to rise. They saw they would all be drowned, and so set to work—the bear included—to erect a high lodge, into the top of which they all went, except some of the fish that plunged into the waters and were never heard of afterwards.

After remaining in this lodge a long time, all the birds were sent off to find the earth, but only the duck returned, with dirt in his bill. Finally the water began to subside, and then their fears of no earth changed to dread lest there be no water. So they sent out a big man to make rivers and lakes, which he accomplished by digging a long trench for the rivers and round holes for the lakes, the earth taken out and thrown aside being the mountains.

I heard a variation of this, which said that the survivors of the flood floated on a raft for a long time without being able to find a resting-place. One day a rat appeared on the surface, and the Indians asked him to dive and see if he could find bottom, and the obliging rat did so, and brought up a mouthful of clay, which forthwith began to grow until it finally became the world.

There seem to be few traditions of battles or of ancient prowess. I heard of only one hero, and he was rather a third-rate Yellow-Knife warrior, whose chief glory seemed to have been acquired through the quantities of meat and grease he could consume at one sitting.

## XXIV

### RETURNING TO THE "LAST WOOD"

FOR one day we went to the westward, and on Tuesday, April 9th, we turned our backs on the Arctic Ocean and started for the "last wood."

Aside from the inexpressible gratification at success and of facing the south, the second and third days of our return journey were the pleasantest of the trip. It was still very cold and the wind fierce, but then no storm beat on our heads, and we were lucky to get meat enough for a bite all round. The sun shone brilliantly on both days, and I had my first and only view of the glory of an arctic sun, surrounded by a triple corona, with longitudinal and latitudinal cross-sectioning rays, and all crowned with four mock suns. This is quite a common spectacle in the arctic regions; but it stormed so steadily during my trip that I saw very little of celestial display either by day or by night.

We saw more caribou in these two days than in the entire eleven days' travel north from the "last wood" to our turning-point. Evidently we had been ahead of all but a few stragglers, and were just now meeting the bands on their migration to the arctic coast.

As we were camping the night of the second day I viewed such a band as made it easy for me to believe the stories of vast numbers in summer, when all the bands join in one countless herd. We were putting up our lodge

when I heard a sound that, though strange, seemed somewhat like the wind, and I gave Beniah a questioning look, and he, answering, said "*Ethen.*" I should have thought he was joking but for the haste with which the Indians grabbed their guns and made off in the direction whence the noise came. When I looked down from the ridge, sure enough, there, about a quarter of a mile away, was a huge herd of caribou on the full run, and it was the noise made by their hoofs in the snow that I had mistaken for the wind.

There must have been several hundred in that herd, and it is comment enough on Indian hunting to say we secured four caribou out of the lot. I astonished the Indians into a chorus of "*nezons*" (good), and, I confess, surprised myself also, by bringing down a bull that was going fast about two hundred and fifty yards away.

The two following days were cold and foggy, the fog on the first day rivalling the density of the London article.

Late in the afternoon of the first day we saw musk-ox tracks as we were crossing a lake, and followed them for a a couple of hours, until they disappeared in the drifting snow.

The second day was just as cold, but the fog had lightened somewhat when, at two o'clock in the afternoon, a band of musk-oxen were sighted about three miles off along the side of a ridge. As I had as many musk-oxen as I wanted, and no wish to shoot for the mere killing, I gave my rifle to Beniah, shouldered my camera instead, leaving my dogs to be unhitched by the Indians, if they wanted them—because some of the Indians were already in full run.

Our party had been progressing southward in two columns, separated by about a mile, with scouts out on either

side, so as to have the better chance of getting whatever game lay in our course.

Beniah's brigade, to which I was attached, was to the westward, and as the musk-oxen had been discovered to the eastward, the other brigade had considerable advantage in starting. Thus it was that we approached in several different parties, and from as many different directions, with the result that the musk-oxen broke into four small herds, of which I could catch occasional glimpses as I raced over the tops of the ridges.

This particular part of the country was more broken up into ridges, I think, than any that I saw.

After a hard run I came up with two of the Indians and three musk-oxen, the last one of which dropped as I got within camera range. Of course I was anxious to get a photograph of the musk-ox alive, and so I went on after one of the other herds. But again I was unfortunate, for as I got on top of one of the little ridges I again heard firing, and saw another Indian put the last touch to two other musk-oxen. I thought this pretty hard luck, but I kept on in the direction of other firing, and in a quarter of a mile came to a small herd surrounded by a number of the dogs and several of the Indians. They were firing as I appeared on the ridge, and half of the musk-oxen were already dead. I yelled, but the Indians paid no attention to me, and I increased my efforts to get within camera range before the killing was ended. I reached the scene of action while there were yet three cows and a couple of calves standing, and "pressed the button." Before I could turn a fresh film into my camera the cows were down; but I secured two more plates of the calves while they were standing at bay before the dogs, and subsequently two plates of the general scene. There was no sun shining, and, as I have said, the day was foggy, so that, unfortu-

DOGS BAYING MUSK-CALF
From a Photograph by the author

nately, the plate showing the three cows was a failure, and the others are so weak as to be almost impossible of reproduction. A yearling and one two-year-old bull were the only males in the entire herd.

I find in my note-book that I neglected to record how many were killed out of that herd, and I do not remember the exact number, but it was about twelve. We had now forty musk-ox robes, and as this is considered an exceptionally good hunt, and we had all that our dogs could drag, Beniah signed to me that we should now make a straight shoot for the "last wood." The sledges were brought up to the scene, and we began skinning the musk cattle, cutting off meat for dog-feed, and laying in a supply of the fat and intestines for our own consumption.

From these preparations I assumed we were likely to see no more musk-oxen, and that we had slight chance of running across caribou; and Beniah, in fact, gave me to understand that the supply we took here must last until we reached Great Slave Lake, helped out by the balls of pemmican and the caribou cow we had cached at the "last wood."

That night two of our party were missing, and repeated firing of guns aroused no response. It was well on towards noon the next day before they turned up, so much the worse for their experience that I gave them what remained of my brandy.

Late in the afternoon of the day after the musk-ox killing we crossed snow-shoe and sledge tracks coming out of the southwest. I cannot describe what a curious sensation the sight of those tracks gave me. It must have been just such a sensation as stirred Robinson Crusoe when he saw the solitary footprint in the sand. Wandering over the Barrens for so many days without the sight of a human face outside of your own party, you grow to a

feeling that you and your party are cut off from the world; and when on a sudden the evidence is presented of others being in that same desolate waste, you experience first wonder and then pity that any one else should be plunging into the misery that you are leaving.

I afterwards learned that those tracks had been made by the Fort Rae Indians, who were just starting into the Barrens for their spring hunt.

With the tracks of those Fort Rae Indians we bade farewell to the last decent weather we were to have until we reached the "last wood."

For four consecutive days we went on against a raging blizzard, over the characteristic country of the Barren Grounds, without seeing a musk-ox, a caribou, or any living creature. Nature had not favored us. While we were going north the storms blew from the arctic into our faces, and when we were going south they whirled around and smote us from that direction. Sometimes they varied and came from the east or west, but that relieved the difficulties of travelling very little. In fact, I believe they were increased, for it wearied the dogs almost more by beating sideways upon them than by driving directly into their faces.

And all the time it was so cold. How cold, I cannot adequately describe; and our wood was going stick by stick, and we had begun on our lodge poles, all but two of which had been consumed by the time we reached the "last wood."

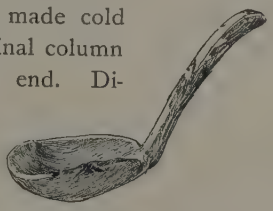
In these four days we again crossed Lake Ecka-tua, at a different point from that on the northward journey, and in the midst of our battling with the storm there was comfort in getting back on territory that you recognized. It seemed as though we were not cast away, after all. It was a blessed thing we had no sun in these days, for at the last

musk-ox killing a number of the Indians were badly snow-blind, so much so that they were obliged to wear a kind of veiling over their faces even in the lodge. And still I was spared.

During these four days of plodding in practical darkness I was impressed with Beniah's accurate gauge of direction. Probably two or three times in the day he would sight over my compass, and then, despite the fact that we could not see very far ahead, he would keep the course with what seemed to me astonishing precision. A number of times there was an incipient mutiny among the Indians, who questioned his direction, but on every occasion my compass settled the dispute and proved Beniah right.

At last, about noon of the fifth day, the storm broke, and though the sun did not appear at first, the clouds lightened, and some of the fury went out of the wind. Still, we could not see very far ahead of us. As the day lengthened the clouds brightened, until at four o'clock it was possible to see ahead quite a little distance.

I was the leading train in the procession, and at six o'clock had reached the top of a ridge, when a scene spread before me that made cold chills chase up and down my spinal column and my hair seem to stand on end. Directly in front, and not half a mile away, was a dark patch. I could scarcely believe my eyes. I stood and gazed at it like one petrified. It seemed as though it must be a mirage. I could not realize that it was the "last wood." By my calculations we were not due to reach it until the next day, and I could not believe we had actually got within sight of timber. But when the Indians came up I knew



MUSK-OX-HORN SPOON

it for the "last wood," for, on viewing it, they broke into shouting and dancing that showed me not the only one to be relieved by the sight of this vanguard of timber land. Even the dogs joined in the celebration by jumping in their harness and setting up their wolfish chorus.

True to Indian custom, we stopped on top of the ridge and viewed the oasis which was to furnish us with a warm fire that night while we smoked a pipe. As we sat there the sun burst forth—just setting—surrounded by a huge ring, and shining through the most splendid exhibition of a "mackerel sky" that I have ever seen. It was only a momentary sight, but while it lasted it was a glorious one. And then we went, as may be imagined, at a good, stiff run until we had entered the "last wood."

No one that has not had a similar experience knows what it means to come again to wood after twenty-two days of wandering over a desolate waste and in bitterest cold; so cold that the head feels as though in a never-warming compress, and the blood seems to stand still. Only those that have been so situated can appreciate what twenty-two days of that condition means to a man who is never more than half fed and most of the time hardly that. The sight of that wood was like a view of water to a man perishing of thirst! And what a fire we had that night! How good it was to sleep on pine brush instead of on rocks and snow, and to sit by a fire and be warmed!

We were counting on having a good meal of caribou when we reached the "last wood," and I had determined on making a feast and a soup of the pemmican and the flour. But when we went to the cache we found to our dismay that it had already been opened, and other than hair and bones there was little left of the caribou, while only one ball of pemmican and scarcely a handful of flour remained to show the work of that despicable and foul

scavenger, the wolverine. I say "foul" because this creature, the pest of the Northland Indian, invariably soils in the cache what he cannot carry off. In our case he had had abundant time to carry on his despoilation.

Well, it was a sad disappointment to find that the monotony of our Barren Ground diet—or, rather, fast—was not yet to be broken; but I do not think we minded it much. We had grown used to it. It was so much easier to go hungry by a warming fire.

## XXV

### THROUGH ARCTIC STORMS TO GREAT SLAVE LAKE

WE were up very early the next day, determined to push our way through the Land of Little Sticks as rapidly as possible, because our supply of provisions was very small, and even at starving rations would scarcely last us to reach Great Slave Lake. At noontime we were made joyful by the sight of a small herd of caribou which two or three of the Indians went after, and afforded me the most annoying and miserable exhibition of marksmanship I had yet witnessed. Those caribou, at a distance of about one hundred and fifty yards, circled around the Indians until each had fired twice without scoring, and then they went over the ridges towards the north on a run.

Our first day in the Land of Little Sticks was a bright one overhead. The sun shone brilliantly, and the warmth brought us to a sharp realization that the middle of April was at hand. Not that it was so very warm—I suppose it was probably about 20° below zero, and the only way I had of judging was from my personal sensations in travelling.

I found in the experience of my long trip that with the thermometer at 40° below zero and no wind I was cool, though not chilled, when running at a gait of about five miles an hour. On the river, in getting down to Slave Lake on my northward journey, at such few times when the thermometer registered around 30° below, I found I

THE USUAL INDIAN MARKSMANSHIP

became comfortably warm in running at the same rate. And now on the first day out in the Land of Little Sticks I was much warmer than I had been when the thermometer was 30° below zero, so that I judge it was about 20°.

Moreover, the snow was now deeper than we had yet encountered. The average depth of snow in this great North country was not, I think, over a foot and a half. The deepest I found anywhere was on the bison hunt, where in some places it was about two and one-half or maybe three feet deep. Snow does not fall at any time to a very great depth in the Northland because of the excessive cold and the continuous gale that blows to keep down the average depth and pack it hard on the rivers and on the Barren Grounds.

On this first day in the Little Sticks we toiled through snow up to our knees, and it was exceedingly hard going for us and for the dogs. I think we made a less number of miles that day than on any previous one, and the reflection from the dazzling white was fearful on the eyes. It was a long day and a hard one, and when we camped at eight o'clock the particular patch of Little Sticks in which we had taken refuge was exceedingly small.

The morning of our second day in the Land of Little Sticks, after a night that filled our lodge with snow and then threw it down, dawned with the most terrific storm that had yet visited its wrath upon us. It was utterly out of the question to raise the lodge, so fierce was the wind, and we propped it up on the sledges while we made our tea over the little sticks that we had gathered the night before. The storm raged so savagely and the snow whirled about us in such blinding fury that we should not have attempted to travel that day, only there was not enough wood for another night's camping in that patch of Little Sticks, and it was better even to face the storm than to lie

in our robes all day at its mercy and without tea. Moreover, our supplies did not permit of idleness, and every one of us would rather face all the furies of the Barren Ground blasts when we knew that at its end we should be a day nearer the timber.

It took us some time to harness the dogs, and then we started, first getting the direction from my compass. No language of mine can describe the violence of that storm or the extremity of our difficulties in facing it. At first it was utterly impossible to see fifty feet ahead of us, and as we went on, beating our way into the very teeth of the blizzard, the wind increased and the snow turned to sleet that cut our faces and covered us with ice from head to foot. I do not suppose we travelled more than a mile an hour.

When we "spelled" we threw ourselves face downward to the leeward of the sledges to escape the cutting sleet and furious wind; and when we started on again we had first to dig the dogs and the sledges from under the snow that in a few moments completely buried us all every time we stopped.

I blessed Foro that day, and forgave him all the tribulation he had visited upon me earlier in the trip. But for that dog I fear I should have been lost. From the tail of my sledge it was impossible to see the one immediately ahead of me, and the wind so rapidly swept away its tracks I could not trust my dogs to follow them; so I went ahead of my dogs, keeping just far enough behind the sledge in front of me to keep it in view, and just far enough in front of Foro that he might not lose sight of me. Both Flossie and Finnette, my two middle dogs, were dragging in the harness, and it was all I could do to keep them moving at all, while faithful Foro had the double duty of pulling them as well as his share of the load. It was impossible to distinguish the color of one dog

MAKING TEA IN THE LAND OF LITTLE STICKS

From a Photograph by the author

from that of another. They were completely incased in ice, and every little while I was obliged to stop and dig the sleet out of Foro's eyes so that he could see to follow me. And thus we went on, stopping only at intervals to rest the dogs, and travelling by compass the entire time.

The dogs were moving slower and slower, and seemed to be freezing in the harness, as we stopped at a point of rocks about four o'clock. When we counted up our number Beniah and one of the Indians with their sledges and dogs were missing. They had been the last of the procession. We fired a few signals, and then as the rocks afforded shelter to the dogs, and there were a few little sticks near by for the tea, we determined to camp for the night. It was with utmost difficulty we set up our lodge, spread out so as to be scarcely waist high in the centre, but it broke the wind sufficiently to enable us to make a cup of tea. We were literally covered with ice from head to foot, and thus, as it was impossible to thaw out by the puny fire we had, we rolled up in our robes for the most miserable night I experienced on the Barren Grounds trip.

There was not much rest for any of us that night, but we started on in the morning determined to force our way through the storm and reach the haven of timber. The storm had abated somewhat, though it still beat upon us with demoniacal rage, and we could hardly keep headway. But for the storm of the day before we should have reached the timber's edge this night, but our travel was slow, and although we kept at it until long after dark there was no sign of timber when we rolled into our robes, supperless, almost hopeless.

Nearly all day we had kept scouts out on either side looking, without success, for Beniah's tracks, and half a dozen times we had fired signals that brought us no re-

sponse. We could do nothing more. We should have taken our lives in hand and been useless to Beniah had we gone back in an effort to trace him from where he had strayed off. The print of a snow-shoe in that gale did not last long enough to be seen by a man following closely upon it, and to attempt to hunt up tracks a night old would have been utmost folly.

I knew Beniah, if he were alive, would keep travelling all night, as he had no lodge and no tea and nothing to eat, and his only chance for his life was to make for the woods. He would, of course, travel south, and I was confident, from my knowledge of his skill, that he would pretty nearly hit the right direction. I knew if he were alive he would reach the wood ahead of us. Still we kept out our scouts and continued our signalling.

NATIVE "SNOW-GLASSES"

It stormed all night of the third day, and our fourth in the Land of Little Sticks opened like the terrible second. How we managed to keep going at all I declare I cannot now understand. Our allowance of food was no greater than we had averaged in the Barrens proper, and the coating of ice in which we were all incased of course had not been thawed out, but on the contrary was thickened by the continuous storming. But I was nerved up, and I suppose the Indians were also, by the hope of reaching timber. We knew we must be very close to it, but we could not see far enough ahead, as we came on to the ridges, to substantiate our hopes. We simply kept plodding and plodding away, expecting every hour to come on to the timber,

and being as hourly disappointed. As we were travelling through a kind of valley my eye caught sight of a birch-tree just to the side of my sledge. How well I remember that birch-tree! And how delighted I was, for I knew by that sign the timber-line was very close.

Late in the afternoon, about four o'clock, it stopped snowing and the atmosphere cleared, and an hour later from the top of a ridge we saw a patch of pine. Another hour and we had passed this patch, and on a ridge south of it saw yet another. I remember with what trepidation I hurried by that patch and up to the ridge beyond, to see if indeed there were still another sign of life, or whether it was all a fancy, and I should look out again upon the old familiar stretch of unbroken, glistening white. It was a sort of daylight nightmare. But the patches were realities, for at six o'clock we stopped on a high ridge, and before us was the edge of timber. It makes me tingle even now to remember my sensation at first sight of pine! What a relief to see nothing but the blackness of the timber as far ahead as we could look! How grateful we were! From now on we went through the stragglers of the timber's edge, and just before dark came upon Beniah's tracks going south.

That night we camped in the timber's edge and discarded our lodge. It was blessed to realize, as I sat by the huge fire, that at least I had left behind me the cursed Barren Grounds, with its cold and wind and desolation.

Next morning it was the 20th day of April, and the sun arose at 4.30 and we were travelling at five o'clock. An hour later we caught up with Beniah and the other Indian, who had camped the night before about five miles from us. Both showed the effects of their dreadful experience, but when I shook hands with Beniah the starvation, the cold, and the misery he had endured found ex-

pression only in "*tea oole*" (no tea). We stopped there to brew Beniah a generous kettle of tea, and then went on, travelling down a chain of lakes all that day, and I was positively delirious with joy at being able to look on any side and see living green trees. The weather in the woods was so much warmer than that to which we had become inured that I discarded my heavy capote in travelling during the day, and on the second night cut the blanket off my sleeping-robe. It was such a comfort to sit up at night around the fire, instead of being obliged to turn in without any fire, and shiver instead of sleep!

For four days we journeyed over the roughest country I had yet seen. As I look back on it now I do not see how we ever got the sledges and the dogs across it. We travelled on a chain of lakes for the first day, but on the second went across the hills, and thereafter, until we reached Slave Lake, there was no rest for dogs or men. Why we did not break our sledges in pieces I do not know; as it was, most of the heads were broken, and nothing remained of the runners. We took the sledges over places where there was a sheer drop of from six to ten feet, and the going all the time was over rocks standing on end, over dead timber, and occasionally over swamps.

We were all using pushing-poles to help the dogs, and even so they were scarcely able to crawl. There was more pushing than pulling of those sledges from the time we reached timber. The three musk-ox heads on my sledge made a heavy load, and I began to fear I should get neither heads nor dogs back to Slave Lake. We were all, men and dogs, completely worn, and every time we "spelled" threw ourselves flat.

The sun had grown very warm, and the tops of the rocks were pretty generally bare. Occasionally we saw little streams of trickling water, and then ensued a scramble

for a drink. And when we rested we sought the bare rocks and sat on them, or hunted the hollows to drink deeply of the melted snow-water. One day, I remember, as I slaved with my shoulder against the pushing-pole I heard a bird note, and it seemed so strange and so sweet I stopped, hoping I might hear it again. Later, as we neared Slave Lake, the little snowbirds flitted about, to my great delight, for it was the first of bird life I had seen since leaving the pert whisky-jack, otherwise known as "camp robber" or moosebird, at Lac la Biche.

On the fifth day, after reaching the timber's edge, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, from a huge bowlder we sighted Great Slave Lake. I could not possibly have felt a deeper, keener joy if, as I stood on top that big rock, New York instead of Slave Lake had been revealed to me. No one can understand what it means to return to familiar ground after an absence in such barrenness as the Barren Grounds.

Hugging the shore of a bay, which was open in the centre, we came out on Great Slave Lake at five o'clock, and the first human being we saw was an ancient Indian dame, moaning over a sledge that held the emaciated remains of her dead baby. A little farther on we came upon a camp of Indian men and women. Some of the women were the wives of the musk-ox hunters who had but a day or so before started on their spring hunt, and the men were largely those that are not sufficiently courageous nor skilled to venture into the Barren Grounds for its boreal rover.

We camped that night close to the Indians, and I went out on a skirmish to get something for my dogs to eat. I still had four or five days' travel to Resolution, and I was much afraid my dogs would not last, and I wished very much to take them back to Gaudet, who had been so

kind in letting me have them when all told him they would not live through the Barren Ground experience. I succeeded in getting several white-fish and some dried caribou. I had a hard time to keep the Indians from appropriating it for their own use, and I should very much have liked a bite of it myself; but my dogs needed it, I thought, more than I, and they ate ravenously. How ravenous they were may be imagined when I say that my steer-dog, Blucher, got wind of a bitch having pups, and devoured them as fast as they were born, until discovered by some of the other dogs, when there ensued a great fight for the remainder of the litter.

We had come out on Slave Lake about a day and a half south of Fort Rae and three days north of where I had left it in going into the Barrens. Next morning we started for Beniah's house on the lake, and all the Indian men and women started with us, as they were moving their camp a few miles for better fishing. It was a curious spectacle, that moving band of Indians. The men went on ahead with their guns, and the women and children followed, driving the dogs and packing the household effects, such as they were. The little children that were not old enough to drive dogs carried their younger brothers and sisters that could not walk, and every one of them carried something.

Of course, we shortly left the Indians, and by noontime had come to Beniah's house, which we found empty, but we did get a good supply of fish for the dogs there, though none for ourselves. We ate instead some dried meat that Beniah raked up from a corner of his house. Beniah signed me that his wife had moved to where there was fishing owing to the lack of meat at this point; so we started again, and at 7.30 that night hove in sight of Beniah's lodge. Immediately we fired guns to signal our

return, and a salute that sounded like a broadside quickly responded.

As we approached the little settlement, the men, women, and children poured out of the three lodges, the men firing their guns as rapidly as they could load, and the women and children shouting. It was quite a royal reception. The men and women fell on one another's necks, and everybody shook everybody's hand, and then formed a compact circle about me while they handled my long hair, shook my hands, and commented on my face, blackened and seamed from exposure.

There was no meat at Beniah's lodge except a few pieces of moose (some Indian must have found the animal asleep and shot it!), which Beniah and I ate with great relish after our constant diet on intestines and fat.

Naturally I was very anxious to get back to Resolution as quickly as possible, so Beniah and I started the next day at two o'clock. Meanwhile I had braced my dogs up wonderfully by generous feeding, and I felt sure they would go through to Resolution. That night we reached the lodge of Capot Blanc, where we had left the lake several weeks before. The next day we made a fire for tea at the very meat cache where I had slept on my second night out from Resolution, and where I had taken my first lessons in Dog-Rib. I sat that noon on a rock and remembered how about two months before on that same spot I had set up little sticks to represent lodges, and used my best efforts in the sign language in an unrewarded endeavor to learn how much farther we were going that night.

Then the Barren Ground trip was all before me; now it was of the past—and there was indescribably deep contentment in the retrospect. Two days more, with the dogs going much better than I expected they would—

on Tuesday, April 30th, at half-past ten in the morning—I, leading the way in accordance with North Country courtesy, rounded a point of Great Slave Lake and beheld Fort Resolution.

In half an hour I was at the post, Gaudet shaking my hand, and the remaining population, all the men, women, and children, crowding about me in rather clamorous welcome.

All things come to an end, and my Barren Ground trip, the hardest a man could make, had run its course.

## XXVI

### UP-STREAM BY CANOE TO CHIPEWYAN

I WOULD like to have remained at Great Slave Lake a week or two, for it was pleasant to be again under a roof and have some one with whom to talk and to eat three meals a day. But there was no time for rest.

When Beniah and I were coming into Resolution I had found the ice of the lake hard, and it gave me hopes of being able to reach Fort Smith on snow-shoes, but the day after I arrived the weather turned so much warmer that everything began melting, and for the next two days the disappearance of snow and the appearance of water on the lake was perceptible. With the dissolving snow my hopes fled of making a fast trip to Fort Smith. Nevertheless, I endeavored to hire Indians for an attempt at getting there on the ice, but the river was reported full of holes, and nothing could induce them to make even a try, declaring their lives would be lost if they did. They seem to have great consideration for a life that at best is filled with misery. I used all persuasion and all the influence I could bring to bear through Gaudet, who was kind enough to exert himself in my behalf. But it was of no use; and as I could not go alone with the dogs, I had to forsake the idea. I knew that once Great Slave River began to break up it would be at least ten days before I could make an ascent in a canoe.

I determined, therefore, on going up Buffalo River, that

headed north for a considerable distance, and the mouth of which was about fifteen miles from Resolution. So I sent an Indian over to see how the Buffalo River looked, and set about getting a canoe in shape. Meanwhile it was thawing rapidly, and spring was not lingering in the lap of winter.

We had the first duck of the season on the first day of May, and the first goose of the season on the second day of May. It was the earliest Northland spring on record. The women had all set off to the woods to make birch syrup; birds put in an appearance, and back of the post in the woods mosquitoes were plentiful. The country was under water, and a most desolate appearance it made. It looks better in winter, for then the snow covers its nakedness, and leaves one to fancy something pleasing under the mantle. But the spring reveals its poverty.

If there was an hour when I was not eating during any one of the four days I spent at Resolution I do not remember it. I had returned very thin, but gained ten pounds before I left Gaudet's cabin.

Ducks and geese kept passing over the post continuously, and every flock threw the settlement into great excitement, every man seeking cover and quacking vigorously so long as the flight lasted. It is customary to bring the first duck and the first goose to the "master," as the Hudson's Bay Company officer is called; and the successful hunter is well rewarded.

On the 3d of May the Buffalo River was reported open by the Indian who was keeping watch for me, and I immediately prepared to send over the canoe. It was rather a problem how to get a birch-bark eighteen feet long with a five-foot beam across the lake, but we accomplished it by lashing two sledges together, held four feet apart by a pole in front and back, and then carrying the canoe

CROSSING GREAT SLAVE, MAY 4TH, 1895

crosswise on top of these, doubling up the dogs to a train of eight.

The rain was dropping steadily when, on the 4th, at nine o'clock in the morning, I started across the lake to the mouth of Buffalo River, and Gaudet, kind and considerate to the last, went to see me off. The walking was exceedingly disconcerting. The ice on the lake for the greater part was under water, sometimes nearly up to my waist, and a great deal of the time knee-deep, and I could not know where the next step might land me. The idea of stepping into a hole and going out of sight under the ice was not entirely comforting. We finally, however, reached the mouth of the river in safety, and made ready to start.

My party consisted of a half-breed, an Indian, and one of the French priests of the post, who was very desirous of making the trip to Chipewyan, and perfectly willing to do his share of work. I was very glad to have a companion, to say nothing of an extra man to handle the paddle, for the canoe was large and the current very swift. It did not take long to stow our provisions of dried caribou meat and tea, and by one o'clock we set off.

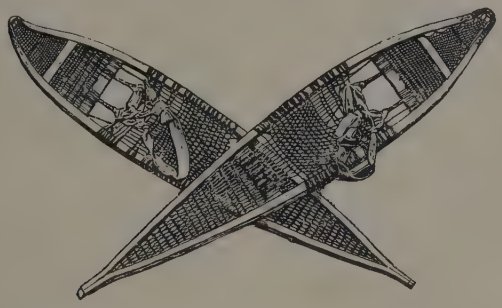
Buffalo River is a narrow stream, which at times widens to possibly seventy-five yards, but as a rule is half that width and in many places very much narrower. For the most part its banks are low and lined with willows, backed by smallish timber. It runs through the north end of the bison country, and is said also to be rather a good section for moose and bear. Other than some fresh bear tracks we saw no signs, but we did see ducks in abundance, and were fortunate enough to kill sufficient to keep us fairly supplied. We also killed one or two beavers, but their flesh is so rich that more than a couple

of consecutive meals rather palls on one. The tail is a much-sought Indian delicacy, and is exceedingly fat.

For three and a half days we labored at the paddles, starting at five o'clock and camping at half-past eight; making two fires, one at ten and one at half-past three; paddling steadily for thirteen and a half hours, and making from thirty-five to forty miles a day.

As we worked our way along bird life was abundant on all sides. I never saw a greater variety of ducks anywhere — mallards so huge I have seen only in California, canvas-backs, redheads, spoon-bills, teals, and a dozen other varieties I did not know. Then there were several kinds of partridges and grouse; one, the willow-partridge, is a very handsome bird, with a black throat and head and scarlet eyebrows, and a brownish body handsomely mottled with orange. Another, the wood-partridge, has brownish plumage, spotted with white and black; then there are a species of the rough grouse, which we know as the fool-hen; and the prairie-chicken, or the sharp-tailed grouse of the United States, which in the North Country is called pheasant. All these birds I found were dryer and not such good eating as elsewhere. And all together, with the large and small ptarmigans, change their plumage to white in winter, though the ptarmigans are the only ones to become completely and absolutely snow-white. There were snipe (larger of body than those we know), blackbirds, robins (similar to ours, save with more brilliant plumage), and another very pretty little bird entirely white, except for brown wings. Rabbits were plentiful too, in the midst of changing the white winter coat for the brown summer one, which gave them a rather curious appearance; and there were squirrels in large numbers that accompanied our paddling with their squeaky chattering.

It was very hard paddling, and it was not of that noiseless, gliding variety we are accustomed to associate with the red man afloat. One Indian was stationed in the bow, another at the stern, and the priest and I were amidships. We took our stroke from the bowman, which was never less than fifty to the minute, and sometimes, when in particularly stiff water, ran up as high as sixty. I am positive in this statement, as I timed them by the watch. This is the common style of paddling among the Northland Indians. Their paddles have



SNOW-SHOES WORN BY THE AUTHOR IN THE BARREN GROUNDS

a three-inch blade, and their stroke is simply a dig at the water accompanied by a great deal of splashing and noise.

It rained for the greater part of the time, and when it did not rain it turned cool enough to freeze the water on our paddle-blades. There were patches of snow all along the banks, and it rather amused me to observe that now, in camping, we chose places where the snow was most abundant, whereas hitherto I had been searching for spots where the snow was least. The reason we now sought snow was because the Buffalo River takes its

rise near the Salt River, and both in a section of country back of Fort Smith where there is a natural deposit of salt. Hence the water is not fit to drink, and we were dependent upon these snowbanks for cooking and drinking water.

On the morning of the fourth day out from Slave Lake the river grew much narrower and more winding, and at one o'clock we came to the point where we were to leave our canoe and make a portage across to Salt River, and thence along the bank of Slave River to Fort Smith.

We arranged our luggage and provisions into packs to average, I should say, about sixty pounds each, and at two o'clock started on our fifteen-mile tramp to Salt River. Such walking I had never experienced, and hope never again to experience. Our way lay directly across a succession of swamps (muskeg). As we stood on their edge they looked as harmless as submerged ponds, with bunches of grass showing every few feet, and over all a coating of smooth ice. But when we launched upon that placid exterior we found its deceptions the bitterest. The ice was not thick enough to bear our weight, and was too thick to break without first jarring with our feet. It was hard ice and sharp, and when we plunged through we went into water up to our knees in some places and a great deal deeper in others. First we cut our moccasins to shreds, and then cut our feet until they bled. Between these submerged swamps were others where there grew a thick underbrush between innumerable mounds of moss and mire, and through these we slipped and slid with one leg ankle-deep in mire and the other probably knee-deep, and all the time the brush slapped our unprotected faces, and the sixty pounds on our backs dragged us deeper into the mire or overbalanced us as we slid from mound to mound.

We had started on this tramp at two o'clock, and when we had gone about four or five miles it was eight o'clock at night, and, utterly exhausted, we threw down our blankets in one of the miry swamps and persuaded ourselves we were resting.

We were off by daylight the next morning, and for five miles more floundered through mud and ice, until at noon we came out on Salt River, about a mile above where it empties into Great Slave River. Here we found an encampment of Indians, and, as the river was open, I made arrangements with a couple of them to take our packs by canoe to Fort Smith, while we went on our twenty-five-mile walk along the bank.

For a while we again encountered muskeg, but after ten or fifteen miles the walking became good, for the country immediately surrounding Fort Smith is the highest in the Northland.

When I reached Fort Smith that night I found it in one of its periods of starvation. Not a bite of anything was in the Hudson's Bay Company store, and most of the families gone to one of the small rivers to catch enough fish for daily subsistence. I had expected to find the post in such a condition, and had therefore taken enough dried meat for myself and Indians from Resolution to last to Chipewyan. "Mc" was off hunting meat for children who were crying from hunger, and the whole atmosphere of Fort Smith was dismal and empty.

When at Fort Smith, on my way north, I had considered the probabilities of an early spring (though this one beat the record by two weeks) and of my delayed return, and had not expected to be able to travel on the ice farther south than Fort Smith on my homeward journey. Therefore I had commissioned "Susie" Beaulieu to build me a skiff, because I knew the ice and timber running in the big river

would be rather apt to punch holes faster than they could be repaired in a birch-bark canoe.

Now on my arrival I could not learn anything of my boat or of the condition of the river at Smith Landing. Directly in front of Fort Smith the river was still frozen

DEADFALL FOR BEAR

from shore to shore, and the Indian who brought our packs up from Salt River had to haul them over the ice for a mile or two.

Next morning I learned the river was broken but my boat not begun, which was pleasing intelligence to a man fretting at every delay and straining every nerve to get out of the wretched country. But that night McKinley returned to comfort his children with a meal of fish and soothe me by placing a dugout at my disposal.

Poor "Mc" had put in a hard winter, and he showed it; he had made several unsuccessful hunting trips, and this time he had been after bear, though with no luck. Bear in this country—there are no grizzly—are caught by the Indians in traps, but McKinley hunts with dogs, and fortune usually favors him, for he has 200 to his credit, and is a noted hunter.

The next morning one of the oxen used in transporting

the Hudson's Bay Company stuff from the landing to the fort was pressed into service, and a cart started off with my luggage for the landing in care of William, the full-blooded Loucheux, of whom I have spoken as being so clever in carving with the "crooked knife."

I did not start until one o'clock, as McKinley was to loan me his bronco. Fort Smith and the landing are the only places in the country north of La Biche where the luxury of horses is indulged, or indeed where they can be used; for in all this vast Northland there is no overland travel except on the portage at Fort Smith. Watercourses are the highways of the country for canoes in summer and for snow-shoes and sledges in winter.

My ride across the portage on McKinley's bronco was the first bit of leisurely travelling I had had. I knew the ox-cart would not arrive until that night, and that I should not be able to leave the landing until the following morning. So I let the horse take his gait, while I fell into a reminiscent mood.

The last time I had crossed that portage was on my return from the disappointing bison hunt, when hunger and a knowledge that McKinley had moose meat gave speed to Munn and me. Then the ground was covered with snow, and the river a great, white, frozen streak; not a sound in the woods of animal life save the occasional whir of a startled ptarmigan. Then the wonderful northern lights showed me the trail. Now the sun shone down so warmly that I threw off my capote. All the snow was gone, and in its place were water and mud. Now all the

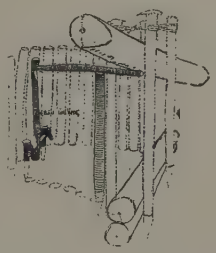


DIAGRAM OF BEAR-TRAP

trees were budding. The ptarmigan had doffed his winter plumage for the more sombre one of summer. Birds were chirping, frogs were croaking in the water-holes, and the river was a great rushing stream, carrying the ice rapidly

MY LUGGAGE *EN ROUTE* FROM FORT SMITH TO THE LANDING
One of the Transport Outfits and William the Interpreter, a Full-blooded Loucheaux Indian

away or piling it into huge masses along the banks. Spring was in evidence on every side. And it was all so very strange and pleasing—so hard to realize that such an utter transformation had been enacted in my absence.

I got off my horse and stretched out on the high river-bank and smoked my pipe in the contentment given by the satisfaction of knowing my Barren Grounds trip was completed, and that I had accomplished what I had been told I could not.

At about five o'clock I rode into the landing to find the dugout a heavy one, thirty feet long by two feet eight inches wide amidships, but of excellent shape for up-current work against the banging of ice and for "track-

ing." It was a much better boat than Beaulieu could have built, and I was disposed to forgive his neglect.

It rained all that night, but the next morning opened clear, and we finally got under way at eight o'clock. I had endeavored to get started at four, but though we were all up and doing at that hour, it was impossible to get the men into the canoe. It is always so; nothing is so difficult as to get the half-breeds away from a post at an early hour, no matter what time preparations are begun; there is always so much hand-shaking and other ceremony preliminary to starting on a trip.

The current of Slave River was not nearly so swift as that of Buffalo River, but it was swift enough to make paddling with a heavy dugout, despite its narrow beam, exceedingly hard work.

I found, after I got started, my men were not very capable. Their experience had evidently been limited, for they knew little of camping.

We were not very fortunate in weather, encountering head-winds nearly the entire distance. Once for part of a day we had a fair wind, and then we rigged up a pole and spread a blanket on it that helped us along considerably. Several times we came very near being swamped in passing under the huge, overhanging banks of ice that sometimes broke off uncomfortably near us. Had one broken off just as we were underneath, we should very likely have heard "something drop." At other times we were nearly swamped by the rough water, as our dugout had not over six inches of free-board; frequently also we were kept busy bailing. As it was, I had everything tied to the crossbars, so that in case we upset I should not lose the trinkets of the country and my camera-plates I was bringing out to illustrate this book.

We encountered floating trees and a good bit of ice

that made navigation at times somewhat hazardous. We made very long days, and at three o'clock on the afternoon of the third day out from the landing reached Athabasca Lake. Here we found low water and a great deal of ice, and were compelled to make a long détour, which brought us to a point three miles from the post, where the ice was solid, and we were obliged to leave our canoe and pack

UNDER SAIL

our luggage to the fort. They had told me at the landing it was a four-day trip, but I had promised a pipe to each of the Indians if we made it in less, so we all worked like galley-slaves, and did it in three. Just how far it is I cannot say. On snow-shoes you cut the points and go straight, and it is 102 miles from Chipewyan to the land-

ing, but in a canoe and up-stream at such a time of year you must follow around every bend of the river and go many miles farther. How many, I know not. I only know the Indians earned their pipes, and we were all very tired, and satisfied we had made a rapid trip.

## XXVII

### FROM CHIPEWYAN TO THE RAILROAD

FOR the second time on my trip luck attended me. It was Wednesday, the 15th of May, when I reached Chipewyan, and Dr. Mackay informed me a flatboat was to start for McMurray on Friday.

Every spring, so soon as the river opens, a sturgeon-head boat, which is from forty to fifty feet long and from ten to twelve feet wide amidships, is sent out from Chipewyan with the fur "packs" and the men who work on the transport at Grand Rapids, an island whence the *battue*, as it is also called, is rowed, where the river-banks are too precipitous to permit walking, and "tracked" where footing is to be had.

A HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY FUR "PACK"

This "tracking" is a method of progression after the manner of canal-boat locomotion. There is a similar long rope, and it is fastened to the *battue* and thence to the chest of the draught animal, and the pace is slow—only Indians in gangs are used instead of mules. This *battue* carries the fur *viâ* McMurray to Grand Rapids, ninety miles beyond, where it meets the Hudson's Bay Company steamer, which lands three miles north of the island. The steamer

HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY STEAMER AND FLATBOATS IN WINTER-QUARTERS AT CHIPEWYAN

delivers its goods, that are then taken by boat down to the islands, transferred its length (three-fourths of a mile) on a tramway, and loaded into the *battues*, and taken on down to McMurray. At McMurray another company steamer, the *Grahame*, takes the goods to Smith Landing *viâ* Chipewyan. Here they are transported by ox-carts across the portage to Fort Smith. At Fort Smith they are loaded on to another steamer, which distributes them to Fort Resolution, Fort Rae, and the Mackenzie River posts, Fort Simpson, Fort Goodhope, and Fort McPherson, on Peels River, which is the most northerly post, being 1800 miles from Edmonton and about 100 miles from the Arctic Ocean.

I could have made quicker time by canoe to McMurray had I been able to hire men; but this was impossible, as they were all employed on the flatboats. Even had I gone by canoe all the way to the island at Grand Rapids and thence to Athabasca Landing, I should not on the whole have gained more than a couple of days; whereas by going with the flatboats and meeting the steamer at the island, I should avoid all the annoyance of hiring Indians and the hard work of paddling, so I considered myself in luck to have reached Chipewyan so opportunely. The two days at Chipewyan I spent writing up my journal and growing fat on wild geese and ducks, with which Dr. Mackay's table was well served.

Chipewyan is the great duck and goose hunting-post of the country. Between May 1st and 15th great flocks are going north, which return again between September 15th and October 1st to 15th, and during those periods their numbers are legion. There are all the varieties of ducks I have already named and many more I do not know; there are four kinds of geese: the "honker," or Canadian gray goose; a smaller gray goose; a large white goose, not quite so large as the "honker;" and a smaller white

goose. Swans are also to be seen, but very rarely shot, as they fly so high and fast. One had been killed, however, shortly before my arrival which weighed twenty-five pounds, drawn and without wings. Another of the bird family in which Chipewyan abounds is the loon, of which there are four different varieties on Lake Athabasca—all of very attractive plumage, from which the Indians make handsome hunting-bags.

Everybody in Chipewyan was much interested in my trip to the Barren Grounds and its success, and Bishop Grouard and Dr. Mackay wanted to give me an affidavit of my having actually made it, because, as they said, people might not credit it, and they themselves would not have believed it had they not positive knowledge of its accomplishment. I told them, however, I thought my word good with the American public, and if I flattered myself in that belief my camera was a witness that could not be denied.

I saw more of post life at this time than in going North, and realized how very far out of the world these people really are. Life at the post varies but little from one end of the year to the other. In winter the topic of conversation is fur and dogs and snow-shoes and caribou; in summer it is boating and fishing.

The day after I arrived Captain Segars, who commanded the *Grahame* (which he expected to float by June 15th), and H. S. Malterner worked their way through the ice, arriving from McMurray. Malterner is an American who the year before had made an attempt to get into the Barren Grounds. He informed me he did not propose to make another, having had enough of it then, but intended going down the Mackenzie River in his canoe. I have since learned he succeeded, and came back on the Hudson's Bay Company steamer.

There was a dance that evening as a farewell spree for the men who were going out in boats, and the next morning, against a very strong head-wind, we started. The wind had blown so hard all night that it had cleared the lake of ice directly in front of the post, but the water was so rough and the wind so strong the men could barely keep the boat moving with their huge fifteen-foot sweeps. For several hours they worked diligently until we got around an island (Potato Island), directly opposite Chipewyan, and here we camped, for it seemed impossible to cross the lake that day. This is the island, by-the-way, where in the earliest days of fur-trading the Northwest Company had its headquarters.

When we landed we found about all the women from the post cutting and drying the fish, which were running in unusually large numbers because of the early spring and low water that had driven them into narrowed channels. The greater part of the island was covered by stagings raised to about six feet, on which the fish were hung as rapidly as cut in half and relieved of their backbones by the squaws. As I watched the quantities of fish dumped before these women, who could not handle them as rapidly as they were brought in by the boats, I wondered again at the improvidence of this people that pass a good half of their lives in starvation. Instead of putting more women at work, they let what fish the few women could not attend to rot in the sun.

The men set the nets, which are about forty fathoms long by three feet deep, and haul the fish ashore, where the squaws do the rest.

The women get one "skin" for every fifty fish dried, or a "skin" for forty white-fish, as these have scales which must be removed. The white-fish are prepared for eating, while the jack-fish and others are dried for the dogs,

which at this season enjoy a short holiday. A woman can handle about two hundred fish a day by steady, quick work.

We were not the only arrivals at the island, for many a canoe blew in loaded with Indians and their families and goods and chattels on the way to the post for the spring trade. Again I witnessed evidence of woman being the country's beast of burden. The men on landing went off to join other men in smoking their pipes, while the women, loaded down like pack-mules, climbed the steep and rocky banks, and pitched the lodges and lighted the fires and cooked the suppers for their luxuriant lords and masters. I noticed one Indian woman toiling up the bank with a baby slung on her back in addition to her pack.

GRIZZLY-CLAW NECKLACE

The storm from which we had sought refuge increased that night, and it was Sunday before we again got under way, and Sunday night when we had finally crossed the lake and gotten into Athabasca River.

Six days of hard work brought us to another Sunday and to Red River, thirty-five miles from McMurray, where the men were to rest a day, for the way had been long and the work steady from five in the morning until half after seven, and, often, much later. Once in a while we had been favored with wind and had sailed, and sometimes, when the banks would permit of it, the boat had been "tracked." But I did not care to lay in camp at Red River with McMurray only thirty-five miles away, and offered Fran-

TRADING IN THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY "OLD STORE" AT EDMONTON

çois (my old dog-driver) four skins to walk on with me to McMurray.

There were quite a number of old friends in the boat's crew, by-the-way. Besides François there was his brother William, who had given me my one day's cariole ride from Chipewyan; and there was "old Jacob," who had run before the dogs from McMurray to Chipewyan, and was now our steersman, and a good one, too; and there was Kipling, who, when John and I were lost on Jack-fish Lake, had brought me the welcome tidings of Spencer's whereabouts.

François and I started out at about nine o'clock, and after very hard walking, for the bank in many places was covered with brush and in other places strewn with rocks, we stopped for a spell opposite an island François said was much over half-way.

Here as we sat smoking we sighted the flatboats of Nagel, a white free trader at Slave Lake, coming down the river in full sail before a very strong wind. As Nagel approached he saluted us and I replied. Instantly he shouted:

"Hello, you are Whitney?"

"Yes," responded I.

"They are getting worried about you at Edmonton," he continued. "They are organizing a search party."

To which I replied: "I hope to get there before they are started."

Meanwhile his boat was sailing rapidly from us as he queried: "Were you successful?"

"Yes," said I, happily.

And thus I had one of my few opportunities of speech in the mother-tongue, and received the first tidings from civilization.

We came to Stony Island, eight miles from McMurray,

at seven o'clock, and hired a canoe of the Indians I found there, reaching McMurray at 11.30. Spencer and his wife had retired, but were glad to see me, and I was glad to see them, for I remembered McMurray as the place where I had slept in a comfortable bed and had had abundant water for washing. They were just as kind to me now as they had been when I went in, and seemed to rejoice as much as I over my success.

François and I were both very tired, for, following the devious banks, we must have covered forty-five miles, and the walking had been of the hardest.

A strong wind favored the flatboats the next day, and they arrived in the evening at six o'clock. Here the men were divided into gangs, and we started the following day on our ninety miles to the island at Grand Rapids with two flatboats.

The entire ninety miles is one succession of rapids so strong that at all times the boat is "tracked," and at some of the swiftest the gangs are doubled up on to one boat, and the tracking-rope, ordinarily about the size of a clothes-line, is replaced by one an inch in diameter.

It had rained almost constantly, and the walking (for I rarely rode except when we sailed, and there was no sailing on this stage of the journey) was hard, unpleasant work. Many times we saw bear tracks, and twice viewed the bear, which had been scared by the noise the Indians made with their shouting and singing. Once we were fortunate enough to kill two moose, which gave us some fresh meat, although it was so unpalatable that neither Spencer nor I cared for it.

Six days of this hard tramping brought us, on Sunday, June 2d, to Gas Spring, which is rather a remarkable freak of nature. There is a spot at the water's edge about three feet in diameter where natural gas is constantly escaping,

WHEN THE DAYS ARE LONG

and at one place where it comes out of the bank it may be lighted, and will burn a steady flame, of such size that it serves travellers very frequently for boiling a kettle.

Here we lay all day, and in the afternoon some of the Indians crossed the river, and, on one of the highest points, made two "lop," "lob," or "nob" sticks, as they are variously called, in honor of Spencer and myself. The "lop stick" is always made on a very high point of ground, and stands as a kind of traveller's guide-post in this wilderness. A prominent pine-tree being selected, the Indian climbs to within eight or ten feet of its top, where he begins to lop off all the branches, and continues to within six or eight feet of the bottom of the tree, thus leaving surmounted upon the bare trunk a nob of green that may be seen a long way off.

When the Indians had returned from making the "lop sticks," the ceremony of dedicating them began. This consisted of calling several times upon the names of those in whose honor they had been cut, and finally ending the performance by a salute from the guns.

Two days later, at 4.30 in the afternoon, we reached the island at Grand Rapids. These Grand Rapids are well named. They are indeed a grand sight; about one mile in length, half a mile in width, and divided into two channels by the island, they roar like a Niagara, and are so turbulent no boat could live on their surface. We were making camp on the island when suddenly I heard a long, loud whistle which sounded like a steamer, but smote upon my ears strangely, because I could not believe myself so near civilization, until Spencer, who detected my consternation, said the steamer had arrived.

The next three days were spent in unloading the steamer and bringing its supplies down to the island in flatboats,

and on June 7th the cargo had been transferred and I went on board. The first person to greet me was Mr. Livock, the Hudson's Bay Company officer who had been so kind to me at Edmonton, and who was now in charge of the boat. And the very next was my one-time guide "Shot," whom I had long since forgiven for the annoyance he gave me. "Shot" was the pilot of the boat, and is, by-the-way, not only one of the very best, but about the only one who can successfully take the steamer from the landing to the island, for the river is very wide and low, and the channel winds among formidable bowlders.

The next morning we started, and on the morning of the fourth day, June 11th, after making several stops for wood, and tying up every night at dark, we arrived at Athabasca Landing at 10.30.

I immediately set out to engage transportation to Edmonton, which is ninety miles away, and finally secured a half-breed, a pair of horses, and a light freight-wagon. We started at one o'clock on that day and travelled until midnight, for I was very anxious to get to Edmonton by the next night in order to catch the semi-weekly train to Calgary. The following morning we started at four o'clock, and that afternoon at five a telegraph-pole and wires, the first signs of civilization, greeted me.

I shall not attempt to describe my feelings when I first viewed those telegraph-wires. The realization that my long trip was really at an end, and that here I was once more in touch with the world, was too overwhelming to transcribe on paper.

Ten minutes later I was in the Queen's Hotel, shaking hands with everybody at once, and deeply grateful that my trip of 2800 miles had come to an end.

11.